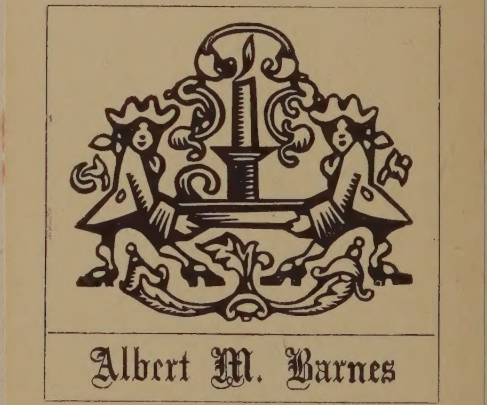
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VOLUME VII

"Sit down. I want to talk to you."

(PAGE 143)

THE NOVELS, STORIES, SKETCHES AND POEMS OF THOMAS NELSON PAGE

GORDON KEITH

II

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK, 1906

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GORDON KEITH

VOL II.

GORDON KEITH

CHAPTER XIX

WICKERSHAM AND PHRONY

KEITH returned home and soon found himself a much bigger man in New Leeds than when he went away. The mine opened on the Rawson property began to give from the first large promises of success.

Keith picked up a newspaper one day a little later. It announced in large head-lines, as befitted the chronicling of such an event, the death of Mr. William Lancaster, capitalist. He had died suddenly in his office. His wife, it was stated, was in Europe and had been cabled the sad intelligence. There was a sketch of his life and also of that of his wife. Their marriage, it was recalled, had been one of the "romances" of the season a few years before. He had taken society by surprise by carrying off one of the belles of the season, the beautiful Miss Yorke. The rest of the notice was taken up in conjec-

tures as to the amount of his property and the sums he would be likely to leave to the various charitable institutions of which he had always been a liberal patron.

Keith laid the paper down on his knee and went off in a revery. Mr. Lancaster was dead! Of all the men he had met in New York he had in some ways struck him the most. He had appeared to him the most perfect type of a gentleman; self-contained, and inclined to be cold, but a man of elegance as well as of brains. He felt that he ought to be sorry Mr. Lancaster was dead, and he tried to be sorry for his wife. He started to write her a letter of condolence, but stopped at the first line, and could get no further. Yet several times a day, for many days, she recurred to him, each time giving him a feeling of dissatisfaction, until at length he was able to banish her from his mind.

Prosperity is like the tide. It comes, each wave higher and higher, until it almost appears that it will never end, and then suddenly it seems to ebb a little, comes up again, recedes again, and, before one knows it, is passing away as surely as it came.

Just when Keith thought that his tide was in full flood, it began to ebb without any apparent

cause, and before he was aware of it, the prosperity which for the last few years had been setting in so steadily in those mountain regions had passed away, and New Leeds and he were left stranded upon the rocks.

Rumor came down to New Leeds from the North. The Wickersham enterprises were said to be hard hit by some of the failures which had occurred.

A few weeks later Keith heard that Mr. Aaron Wickersham was dead. The clerks said that he had had a quarrel with his son the day after the panic and had fallen in an apoplectic fit soon afterwards. But then the old clerks had been discharged immediately after his death. Young Wickersham said he did not want any deadwood in his offices. Also he did not want any dead property. Among his first steps was the sale of the old Keith plantation. Gordon, learning that it was for sale, got a friend to lend him the money and bought it in, though it would scarcely have been known for the same place. The mansion had been stripped of its old furniture and pictures soon after General Keith had left there, and the plantation had gone down.

Rumor also said that Wickersham's affairs were in a bad way. Certainly the new head of

the house gave no sign of it. He opened a yet larger office and began operations on a more extensive scale. The *Clarion* said that his Southern enterprises would be pushed actively, and that the stock of the Great Gun Mine would soon be on the New York Exchange.

Ferdy Wickersham suddenly returned to New Leeds, and New Leeds showed his presence. Machinery was shipped sufficient to run a dozen mines. He not only pushed the old mines, but opened a new one. It was on a slip of land that lay between the Rawson property and the stream that ran down from the mountain. Some could not understand why he should run the shaft there, unless it was that he was bent on cutting the Rawson property off from the stream. It was a perilous location for a shaft, and Matheson, the superintendent, had protested against it.

Matheson's objections proved to be well founded. The mine was opened so near the stream that water broke through into it, as Matheson had predicted, and though a strong wall was built, the water still got in, and it was difficult to keep it pumped out sufficiently to work. Some of the men struck. It was known that Wickersham had nearly come to a rupture with

the hard-headed Scotchman over it; but Wickersham won. Still, the coal did not come. It was asserted that the shafts had failed to reach coal. Wickersham laughed and kept on—kept on till coal did come. It was heralded abroad. The *Clarion* devoted columns to the success of the "Great Gun Mine" and Wickersham.

Wickersham naturally showed his triumph. He celebrated it in a great banquet at the New Windsor, at which speeches were made which likened him to Napoleon and several other generals. Mr. Plume declared him "greater than Themistocles, for he could play the lute and make a small city a great one."

Wickersham himself made a speech, in which he professed his joy that he had silenced the tongue of slander and wrested from detraction a victory not for himself, but for New Leeds. His enemies and the enemies of New Leeds were, he declared, the same. They would soon see his enemies suing for aid. He was applauded to the echo. All this and much more was in the *Clarion* next day, with some very pointed satire about "rival mines."

Keith, meantime, was busy poring over plats and verifying lines.

The old squire came to town a morning or two later.

"I see Mr. Wickersham's struck coal at last," he said to Keith, after he had got his pipe lit. His face showed that he was brimming with information.

"Yes—*our* coal." Keith showed him the plats. "He is over our line—I do not know just where, but in here somewhere."

The old fellow put on his spectacles and looked long and carefully.

"He says he owns it all; that he'll have us suin' for pardon?"

"Suing for damages."

The old squire gave a chuckle of satisfaction. "He is in and about *there.*" He pointed with a stout and horny finger.

"How did you know?"

"Well, you see, little Dave Dennison—you remember Dave? You taught him."

"Perfectly—I mean, I remember him perfectly. He is now in New York."

"Yes. Well, Dave he used to be sweet on Phrony, and he seems to be still sweet on her."

Mr. Keith nodded.

"Well, of course, Phrony she's lookin' higher than Dave—but you know how women air?"

"I don't know—I know they are strange creatures," said Keith, almost with a sigh, as his past with one woman came vividly before him.

"Well, they won't let a man go, noway, not entirely—unless he's in the way. So, though Phrony don't keer nothin' in the world about Dave, she sort o' kep' him on-an'-off-like till this here young Wickersham come down here. You know, I think she and him like each other? He's been to see her twicet and is always a-writin' to her?" His voice had an inquiry in it; but Keith took no notice of it, and the old man went on.

"Well, since then she's sort of cooled off to Dave—won't have him around—and Dave's got sort of sour. Well, he hates Wickersham, and he up and told her t'other night 't Wickersham was the biggest rascal in New York; that he had 'most broke his father and had put the stock of this here new mine on the market, an' that he didn't have coal enough in it to fill his hat; that he'd been down in it an' that the coal all come out of our mine."

Keith's eyes glistened.

"Exactly."

"Well, with that she got so mad with Dave, she wouldn't speak to him; and Dave left, swear-

in' he'd settle Wickersham and show him up, and he'll do it if he can."

"Where is he?" asked Keith, in some anxiety. "Tell him not to do anything till I see him."

"No; I got hold of him and straightened him out. He told me all about it. He was right much cut up. He jest cried about Phrony."

Keith wrote a note to Wickersham. He referred to the current rumors that the cutting had run over on their side, suggesting, however, that it might have been by inadvertence.

When this letter was received, Wickersham was in conference with his superintendent, Mr. Matheson. The interview had been somewhat stormy, for the superintendent had just made the very statement that Keith's note contained. He was not in a placid frame of mind, for the work was going badly; and Mr. Plume was seated in an arm-chair listening to his report. He did not like Plume, and had wished to speak privately to Wickersham; but Wickersham had told him to go ahead, that Plume was a friend of his, and as much interested in the success of the work as Matheson was. Plume's satisfaction and nonchalant air vexed the Scotchman. Just then Keith's note came, and Wickersham,

after reading it, tossed it over first to Plume. Plume read it and handed it back without the least change of expression. Then Wickersham, after some reflection, tossed it to Matheson.

"That's right," he nodded, when he had read it. "We are already over the line so far that the men know it."

Wickersham's temper gave way.

"Well, I know it. Do you suppose I am so ignorant as not to know anything? But I am not fool enough to give it away. You need not go bleating around about it everywhere."

Plume's eye glistened with satisfaction.

The superintendent's brow, which had clouded, grew darker. He had already stood much from this young man. He had followed his orders in running the mine beyond the lines shown on the plats; but he had accepted Wickersham's statement that the lines were wrong, not the workings.

"I wush you to understand one thing, Mr. Wickersham," he said. "I came here to superintend your mines and to do my work like an honest man; but I don't propose to soil my hands with any dirrty dealings, or to engage in any violation of the law; for I am a law-abiding, God-fearing man, and before I'll do it I'll go."

"Then you can go," said Wickersham, angrily. "Go, and be d—d to you! I will show you that I know my own business."

"Then I will go. I do not think you do know it. If you did, you would not—"

"Never mind. I want no more advice from you," snarled Wickersham.

"I would like to have a letter saying that the work that has been done since you took charge has been under your express orders."

"I'll see you condemned first. I suppose it was by my orders that the cutting ran so near to the creek that that work had to be done to keep the mine from being flooded?"

"It was, by your *express* orders."

"I deny it. I suppose it was by my orders that the men were set on to strike?"

"You were told of the danger and the probable consequences of your insisting."

"Oh, you are always croaking—"

"And I will croak once more," said the discharged official. "You will never make that mine pay, for there is no coal there. It is all on the other side of the line."

"I won't! Well, I will show you. I, at least, stand a better chance to make it pay than I ever did before. I suppose you propose now to

go over to Keith and tell him all you know about our work. I imagine he would like to know it—more than he knows already."

"I am not in the habit of telling the private affairs of my employers," said the man, coldly. "He does not need any information from me. He is not a fool. He knows it."

"Oh, he does, does he! Then you told him," asserted Wickersham, furiously.

This was more than the Scotchman could bear. He had already stood much, and his face might have warned Wickersham. Suddenly it flamed. He took one step forward, a long one, and rammed his clinched and hairy fist under the young man's nose.

"You lie! And, —— you! you know you lie. I'm a law-abiding, God-fearing man; but if you don't take that back, I will break every bone in your face. I've a mind to do it anyhow."

Wickersham rolled back out of his chair as if the knotted fist under his nose had driven him. His face was white as he staggered to his feet.

"I didn't mean—I don't say—. What do you mean anyhow?" he stammered.

"Take it back." The foreman advanced slowly.

"Yes—I didn't mean anything. What are you getting so mad about?"

The foreman cut him short with a fierce gesture. "Write me that paper I want, and pay me my money."

"Write what—?"

"That the lower shaft and the last drift was cut by your order. Write it!" He pointed to the paper on the desk.

Wickersham sat down and wrote a few lines. His hand trembled.

"Here it is," he said sullenly.

"Now pay me," said the glowering Scotchman.

The money was paid, and Matheson, without a word, turned and walked out.

"D—— him! I wish the mine had fallen in on him," Wickersham growled.

"You are well quit of him," said Mr. Plume, consolingly.

"I'll get even with him yet."

"You have to answer your other friend," observed Mr. Plume.

"I'll answer him." He seized a sheet of paper and began to write, annotating it with observations far from complimentary to Keith and Matheson. He read the letter to Plume.

It was a curt inquiry whether Mr. Keith meant to make the charge that he had crossed his line. If so, Wickersham & Company knew their remedy and would be glad to know at last the source whence these slanderous reports had come.

"That will settle him."

Mr. Plume nodded. "It ought to do it."

Keith's reply to this note was sent that night. It stated simply that he did make the charge, and if Mr. Wickersham wished it, he was prepared to prove it.

Wickersham's face fell. "Matheson's been to him."

"Or some one else," said Mr. Plume. "That Bluffy hates you like poison. You've got to do something and do it quick."

Wickersham glanced up at Plume. He met his eye steadily. Wickersham's face showed the shadow of a frown; then it passed, leaving his face set and a shade paler. He looked at Plume again and licked his lips. Plume's eye was still on him.

"What do you know?" he asked Plume.

"Only what others know. They all know it or will soon."

Wickersham's face settled more. He cursed in a low voice and then relapsed into reflection.

"Get up a strike," said Plume. "They are ripe for it. Close her down and blow her up."

Wickersham's countenance changed, and presently his brow cleared.

"It will serve them right. I'll let them know who owns these mines."

Next morning there was posted a notice of a cut of wages in the Wickersham mines. There was a buzz of excitement in New Leeds and anger among the mining population. At dinner-time there were meetings and much talking. That night again there were meetings and whiskey and more talking,—louder talking,—speeches and resolutions. Next morning a committee waited on Mr. Wickersham, who received the men politely but coldly. He "thought he knew how to manage his own business. They must be aware that he had spent large sums in developing property which had not yet begun to pay. When it began to pay he would be happy, etc. If they chose to strike, all right. He could get others in their places."

That night there were more meetings. Next day the men did not go to work. By evening many of them were drunk. There was talk of violence. Bill Bluffy, who was now a miner, was especially savage.

Keith was surprised, a few days later, as he was passing along the street, to meet Euphronia Tripper. He spoke to her cordially. She was dressed showily and was handsomer than when he saw her last. The color mounted her face as he stopped her, and he wondered that Wickersham had not thought her pretty. When she blushed she was almost a beauty. He asked about her people at home, inquiring in a breath when she came, where she was staying, how long she was going to remain, etc.

She answered the first questions glibly enough; but when he inquired as to the length of her visit and where she was staying, she appeared somewhat confused.

"I have cousins here, the Turleys."

"Oh! You are with Mr. Turley?" Keith felt relieved.

"Ur—no—I am not staying with them. I am with some other friends." Her color was coming and going.

"What is their name?"

"Their name? Oh—uh—I don't know their names."

"Don't know their names!"

"No. You see it's a sort of private boarding-house, and they took me in."

"Oh, I thought you said they were friends," said Keith.

"Why, yes, they are, but—I have forgotten their names. Don't you understand?"

Keith did not understand.

"I only came a few days ago, and I am going right away."

Keith passed on. Euphronia had clearly not changed her nature. Insensibly, Keith thought of Ferdy Wickersham. Old Rawson's conversation months before recurred to him. He knew that the girl was vain and light-headed. He also knew Wickersham.

He mentioned to Mr. Turley having seen the girl in town, and the old fellow went immediately and took her out of the little boarding-house where she had put up, and brought her to his home.

Keith was not long in doubt as to the connection between her presence and Wickersham's.

Several times he had occasion to call at Mr. Turley's. On each occasion he found Wickersham there, and it was very apparent that he was not an unwelcome visitor.

It was evident to Keith that Wickersham was trying to make an impression on the young girl.

That evening so long ago when he had come on her and Wickersham in the old squire's orchard came back to him, and the stalwart old countryman, with his plain ways, his stout pride, his straight ideas, stood before him. He knew his pride in the girl; how close she was to his heart; and what a deadly blow it would be to him should anything befall her. He knew, moreover, how fiercely he would avenge any injury to her.

He determined to give Wickersham a hint of the danger he was running, if, as he believed, he was simply amusing himself with the girl. He and Wickersham still kept up relations ostensibly friendly. Wickersham had told him he was going back to New York on a certain day; but three days later, as Keith was returning late from his mines, he came on Wickersham and Phrony in a byway outside of the town. His arm was about her. They were so closely engaged that they did not notice him until he was on them. Phrony appeared much excited. "Well, I will not go otherwise," Keith heard her say. She turned hastily away as Keith came up, and her face was scarlet with confusion, and even Wickersham looked disconcerted.

That night Keith waited for Wickersham at

the hotel till a late hour, and when at length Wickersham came in he met him.

"I thought you were going back to New York?" he said.

"I find it pleasanter here," said the young man, with a significant look at him.

"You appear to find it pleasant."

"I always make it pleasant for myself wherever I go, my boy. You are a Stoic; I prefer the Epicurean philosophy."

"Yes? And how about others?"

"Oh, I make it pleasant for them too. Didn't it look so to-day?" The glance he gave him authorized Keith to go on.

"Did it ever occur to you that you might make it too pleasant for them—for a time?"

"Ah! I have thought of that. But that's their lookout."

"Wickersham," said Keith, calmly, "that's a very young girl and a very ignorant girl, and, so far as I know, a very innocent one."

"Doubtless you know!" said the other, insolently.

"Yes, I believe she is. Moreover, she comes of very good and respectable people. Her grandfather—"

"My dear boy, I don't care anything about

the grandfather! It is only the granddaughter I am interesting myself in. She is the only pretty girl within a hundred miles of here, unless you except your old friend of the dance-hall, and I always interest myself in the prettiest woman about me."

"Do you intend to marry her?"

Wickersham laughed, heartily and spontaneously.

"Oh, come now, Keith. Are you going to marry the dance-hall keeper, simply because she has white teeth?"

Keith frowned a little.

"Never mind about me. Do you propose to marry her? She, at least, does not keep a dance-hall."

"No; I shall leave that for you." His face and tone were insolent, and Keith gripped his chair. He felt himself flush. Then his blood surged back; but he controlled himself and put by the insolence for the moment.

"Leave me out of the matter. Do you know what you are doing?" His voice was a little unsteady.

"I know at least what you are doing: interfering in my business. I know how to take care of myself, and I don't need your assistance."

"I was not thinking of you, but of her—"

"That's the difference between us. I was," said Ferdy, coolly. He rolled a cigarette.

"Well, you will have need to think of yourself if you wrong that girl," said Keith. "For I tell you now that if anything were to happen to her, your life would not be worth a button in these mountains."

"There are other places besides the mountains," observed Wickersham. But Keith noticed that he had paled a little and his voice had lost some of its assurance.

"I don't believe the world would be big enough to hide you. I know two men who would kill you on sight."

"Who is the other one?" asked Wickersham.

"I am not counting myself—yet," said Keith, quietly. "It would not be necessary. The old squire and Dave Dennison would take my life if I interfered with their rights."

"You are prudent," said Ferdy.

"I am forbearing," said Keith.

Wickersham's tone was as insolent as ever, but as he leaned over and reached for a match, Keith observed that his hand shook slightly. And the eyes that were levelled at Keith through the smoke of his cigarette were unsteady.

Next morning Ferdy Wickersham had a long interview with Plume, and that night Mr. Plume had a conference in his private office with a man—a secret conference, to judge from the care with which doors were locked, blinds pulled down, and voices kept lowered. He was a stout, youngish fellow, with a low forehead, lowering eyes, and a sodden face. He might once have been good-looking, but drink was written on Mr. William Bluffy now in ineffaceable characters. Plume alternately cajoled him and hectored him, trying to get his consent to some act which he was unwilling to perform.

"I don't see the slightest danger in it," insisted Plume, "and you did not use to be afraid. Your nerves must be getting loose."

The other man's eyes rested on him with something like contempt.

"My nerves 're all right. I ain't skeered; but I don't want to mix up in your —— business. If a man wants trouble with me, he can get it and he knows how to do it. I don't like yer man Wickersham—not a little bit. But I don't want to do it that way. I'd like to meet him fair and full on the street and settle which was the best man."

Plume began again. "You can't do that way

here now. That's broke up. But the way I tell you is the real way." He pictured Wickersham's wealth, his hardness toward his employees, his being a Yankee, his boast that he would injure Keith and shut up his mine.

"What've you got against him?" demanded Mr. Bluffy. "I thought you and him was thick as thieves?"

"It's a public benefit I'm after," declared Plume, unblushingly. "I am for New Leeds first, last, and all the time."

"You must think you are New Leeds," observed Bluffy.

Plume laughed.

"I've got nothing against him particularly, though he's injured me deeply. Hasn't he thrown all the men out of work!" He pushed the bottle over toward the other, and he poured out another drink and tossed it off. "You needn't be so easy about him. He's been mean enough to you. Wasn't it him that gave the description of you that night when you stopped the stage?"

Bill Bluffy's face changed, and there was a flash in his eye.

"Who says I done it?"

Plume laughed. "I don't say you did it.

You needn't get mad with me. He says you did it. Keith said he didn't know what sort of man it was. Wickersham described you so that everybody knew you. I reckon if Keith had back-stood him you'd have had a harder time than you did."

The cloud had gathered deeper on Bluffy's brow. He took another drink.

"—— him! I'll blow up his —— mine and him, too!" he growled. "How did you say 'twas to be done?"

Plume glanced around at the closed windows and lowered his voice as he made certain explanations.

"I'll furnish the dynamite."

"All right. Give me the money."

But Plume demurred.

"Not till it's done. I haven't any doubt about your doing it," he explained quickly, seeing a black look in Bluffy's eyes. "But you know yourself you're liable to get full, and you mayn't do it as well as you otherwise would."

"Oh, if I say I'll do it, I'll do it."

"You needn't be afraid of not getting your money."

"I ain't afraid," said Bluffy, with an oath. "If I don't get it I'll get blood." His eyes as

they rested on Plume had a sudden gleam in them.

When Wickersham and Plume met that night the latter gave an account of his negotiation. "It's all fixed," he said, "but it costs more than I expected—a lot more," he said slowly, gauging Wickersham's views by his face.

"How much more? I told you my limit."

"We had to do it," said Mr. Plume, without stating the price.

Wickersham swore.

"He won't do it till he gets the cash," pursued Plume. "But I'll be responsible for him," he added quickly, noting the change in Wickersham's expression.

Again Wickersham swore; and Plume changed the subject.

"How'd you come out?" he asked.

"When—what do you mean?"

Plume jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "With the lady?"

Wickersham sniffed. "All right." He drifted for a moment into reflection. "The little fool's got conscientious doubts," he said presently, with a half-smile. "Won't go unless—." His eyes rested on Plume's with a gauging expression in them.

"Well, why not? That's natural enough. She's been brought up right. They're proud as anybody. Her grandfather—"

"You're a fool!" said Wickersham, briefly.

"You can get some one to go through a ceremony for you that would satisfy her and wouldn't peach afterwards—"

"What a damned scoundrel you are, Plume!" said Mr. Wickersham, coldly.

Plume's expression was between a smile and a scowl, but the smile was less pleasant than the frown.

"Get her to go to New York— When you've got her there you've got her. She can't come back. Or I could perform it myself? I've been a preacher—am one now," said Plume, without noticing the interruption further than by a cold gleam in his eyes.

Wickersham laughed derisively.

"Oh, no, not that. I may be given to my own diversions somewhat recklessly, but I'm not so bad as to let you touch any one I—I take an interest in."

"As you like," said Plume, curtly. "I just thought it might be a convenience to you. I'd help you out. I don't see 't you need be so —— squeamish. What you're doing ain't so pure

an' lofty 't you can set up for Marcus Aurelius and St. Anthony at once."

"At least, it's better than it would be if I let you take a hand in it," sneered Wickersham.

The following afternoon Wickersham left New Leeds somewhat ostentatiously. A few strikers standing sullenly about the station jeered as he passed in. But he took no notice of them. He passed on to his train.

A few nights later a tremendous explosion shook the town, rattling the windows, awakening people from their beds, and calling the timid and the curious into the streets.

It was known next morning that some one had blown up the Great Gun Mine, opened at such immense cost. The dam that kept out the water was blown up; the machinery had been wrecked, and the mine was completely destroyed.

The *Clarion* denounced it as the deed of the strikers. The strikers held a meeting and denounced the charge as a foul slander; but the *Clarion* continued to denounce them as *hostes humani generis.*

It was, however, rumored around that it was not the strikers at all. One rumor even declared that it was done by the connivance of the com-

pany. It was said that Bill Bluffy had boasted of it in his cups. But when Mr. Bluffy was asked about it he denied the story in toto. He wasn't such a —— fool as to do such a thing as that, he said. For the rest, he cursed Mr. Plume with bell, book, and candle.

A rumor came to Keith one morning a few days later that Phrony Tripper had disappeared.

She had left New Leeds more than a week before, as was supposed by her relatives, the Turleys, to pay a visit to friends in the adjoining State before returning home. To others she had said that she was going to the North for a visit, whilst yet others affirmed that she had given another destination. However this might be, she had left not long after Wickersham had taken his departure, and her leaving was soon coupled with his name. One man even declared that he had seen the two together in New York.

Another name was connected with the girl's disappearance, though in a different way. Terpsichore suggested that Mr. Plume had had something to do with it, and that he could give information on the subject if he would. Mr. Plume had been away from New Leeds

for several days about the time of Phrony's departure.

"He did that Wickersham's dirty work for him; that is, what he didn't do for himself," declared the young woman.

Plume's statement was that he had been off on private business and had met with an accident. The nature of this "accident" was evident in his appearance.

Keith was hardly surprised when, a day or two after the rumor of the girl's disappearance reached him, a heavy step thumping outside his office door announced the arrival of Squire Rawson. When the old man opened the door, Keith was shocked to see the change in him. He was haggard and worn, but there was that in his face which made Keith feel that whoever might be concerned in his granddaughter's disappearance had reason to beware of meeting him.

"You have heard the news?" he said, as he sank into the chair which Keith offered him.

Keith said that he had heard it, and regretted it more than he could express. He had only waited, hoping that it might prove untrue, to write to him.

"Yes, she has gone," added the old man, moodily. "She's gone off and married with-

out sayin' a word to me or anybody. I didn't think she'd 'a' done it."

Keith gasped with astonishment. A load appeared to be lifted from him. After all, she was married. The next moment this hope was dashed by the squire.

"I always thought," said the old man, "that that young fellow was hankerin' around her a good deal. I never liked him, because I didn't trust him. And I wouldn't 'a' liked him anyway," he added frankly; "and I certainly don't like him now. But—." He drifted off into reflection for a moment and then came back again—"Women-folks are curious creatures. Phrony's mother she appeared to like him, and I suppose we will have to make up with him. So I hev come up here to see if I can git his address."

Keith's heart sank within him. He knew Ferdy Wickersham too well not to know on what a broken reed the old man leaned.

"Some folks was a-hintin'," pursued the old fellow, speaking slowly, "as, maybe, that young man hadn't married her; but I knowed better then that, because, even if Phrony warn't a good girl,—which she is, though she ain't got much sense,—he knowed *me*. They ain't none of 'em

ever intimated that to *me,*'' he added explanatorily.

Keith was glad that he had not intimated it. As he looked at the squire, he knew how dangerous it would be. His face was settled into a grimness which showed how perilous it would be for the man who had deceived Phrony, if, as Keith feared, his apprehensions were well founded.

But at that moment both Phrony and Wickersham were far beyond Squire Rawson's reach.

The evening after Phrony Tripper left New Leeds, a young woman somewhat closely veiled descended from the train in Jersey City. Here she was joined on the platform a moment later by a tall man who had boarded the train at Washington, and who, but for his spruced appearance, might have been taken for Mr. J. Quincy Plume. The young woman having intrusted herself to his guidance, he conducted her across the ferry, and on the other side they were met by a gentleman, who wore the collar of his overcoat turned up. After a meeting more or less formal on one side and cordial on the other, the gentleman gave a brief direction to Mr. Plume, and, with the lady, entered a car-

riage which was waiting and drove off, Mr. Plume following a moment later in another vehicle.

"Know who that is?" asked one of the ferry officials of another. "That's F. C. Wickersham, who has made such a pile of money. They say he owns a whole State down South."

"Who is the lady?"

The other laughed. "Don't ask me; you can't keep up with him. They say they can't resist him."

An hour or two later, Mr. Plume, who had been waiting for some time in the café of a small hotel not very far up-town, was joined by Mr. Wickersham, whose countenance showed both irritation and disquietude. Plume, who had been consoling himself with the companionship of a decanter of rye whiskey, was in a more jovial mood, which further irritated the other.

"You say she has balked? Jove! She has got more in her than I thought!"

"She is a fool!" said Wickersham.

Plume shut one eye. "Don't know about that. Madame de Maintenon said: 'There is nothing so clever as a good woman.' Well, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"Take a drink," said Mr. Plume, to whom this was a frequent solvent of a difficulty.

Wickersham followed his advice, but remained silent.

In fact, Mr. Wickersham, after having laid most careful plans and reached the point for which he had striven, found himself, at the very moment of victory, in danger of being defeated. He had induced Phrony Tripper to come to New York. She was desperately in love with him, and would have gone to the ends of the earth for him. But he had promised to marry her; it was to marry him that she had come. As strong as was her passion for him, and as vain and foolish as she was, she had one principle which was stronger than any other feeling—a sense of modesty. This had been instilled in her from infancy. Among her people a woman's honor was ranked higher than any other feminine virtue. Her love for Wickersham but strengthened her resolution, for she believed that, unless he married her, his life would not be safe from her relatives. Now, after two hours, in which he had used every persuasion, Wickersham, to his unbounded astonishment, found himself facing defeat. He had not given her credit for so much resolution. Her answer to

all his efforts to overcome her determination was that, unless he married her immediately, she would return home; she would not remain in the hotel a single night. "I know they will take me back," she said, weeping.

This was the subject of his conversation, now, with his agent, and he was making up his mind what to do, aided by more or less frequent applications to the decanter which stood between them.

"What she says is true," declared Plume, his courage stimulated by his liberal potations. "You won't be able to go back down there any more. There are a half-dozen men I know, would consider it their duty to blow your brains out."

Wickersham filled his glass and tossed off a drink. "I am not going down there any more, anyhow."

"I suppose not. But I don't believe you would be safe even up here. There is that devil, Dennison: he hates you worse than poison."

"Oh—up here—they aren't going to trouble me up here."

"I don't know—if he ever got a show at you—Why don't you let me perform the ceremony?" he began persuasively. "She knows I've been

a preacher. That will satisfy her scruples, and then, if you ever had to make it known—? But no one would know then."

Wickersham declined this with a show of virtue. He did not mention that he had suggested this to the girl but she had positively refused it. She would be married by a regular preacher or she would go home.

"There must be some one in this big town," suggested Plume, "who will do such a job privately and keep it quiet? Where is that preacher you were talking about once that took flyers with you on the quiet? You can seal his mouth. And if the worst comes to the worst, there is Montana; you can always get out of it in six weeks with an order of publication. *I* did it," said Mr. Plume, quietly, "and never had any trouble about it."

"You did! Well, that's one part of your rascality I didn't know about."

"I guess there are a good many of us have little bits of history that we don't talk about much," observed Mr. Plume, calmly. "I wouldn't have told you now, but I wanted to help you out of the fix that—"

"That you have helped me get into," said Wickersham, with a sneer.

"There is no trouble about it," Plume went on. "You don't want to marry anybody else —now, and meantime it will give you the chance you want of controlling old Rawson's interest down there. The old fellow can't live long, and Phrony is his only heir. You will have it all your own way. You can keep it quiet if you wish, and if you don't, you can acknowledge it and bounce your friend Keith. If I had your hand I bet I'd know how to play it."

"Well, by ——! I wish you had it," said Wickersham, angrily.

Wickersham had been thinking hard during Plume's statement of the case, and what with his argument and an occasional application to the decanter of whiskey, he was beginning to yield. Just then a sealed note was handed him by a waiter. He tore it open and read:

"I am going home; my heart is broken. Good-by.
"PHRONY."

With an oath under his breath, he wrote in pencil on a card: "Wait; I will be with you directly."

"Take that to the lady," he said. Scribbling a few lines more on another card, he gave Plume some hasty directions and left him.

When, five minutes afterwards, Mr. Plume finished the decanter, and left the hotel, his face had a crafty look on it. "This should be worth a good deal to you, J. Quincy," he said.

An hour later the Rev. Mr. Rimmon performed in his private office a little ceremony, at which, besides himself, were present only the bride and groom and a witness who had come to him a half-hour before with a scribbled line in pencil requesting his services. If Mr. Rimmon was startled when he first read the request, the surprise had passed away. The groom, it is true, was, when he appeared, decidedly under the influence of liquor, and his insistence that the ceremony was to be kept entirely secret had somewhat disturbed Mr. Rimmon for a moment. But he remembered Mr. Plume's assurance that the bride was a great heiress in the South, and knowing that Ferdy Wickersham was a man who rarely lost his head,—a circumstance which the latter testified by handing him a roll of greenbacks amounting to exactly one hundred dollars,—and the bride being very pretty and shy, and manifestly most eager to be married, he gave his word to keep the matter a secret until they should authorize him to divulge it.

When the ceremony was over, the bride requested Mr. Rimmon to give her her "marriage lines." This Mr. Rimmon promised to do; but as he would have to fill out the blanks, which would take a little time, the bride and groom, having signed the paper, took their departure without waiting for the certificate, leaving Mr. Plume to bring it.

A day or two later a steamship of one of the less popular companies sailing to a Continental port had among its passengers a gentleman and a lady who, having secured their accommodations at the last moment, did not appear on the passenger list.

It happened that they were unknown to any of the other passengers, and as they were very exclusive, they made no acquaintances during the voyage. If Mrs. Wagram, the name by which the lady was known on board, had one regret, it was that Mr. Plume had failed to send her her marriage certificate, as he had promised to do. Her husband, however, made so light of it that it reassured her, and she was too much taken up with her wedding-ring and new diamonds to think that anything else was necessary.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. LANCASTER'S WIDOWHOOD

THE first two years of her widowhood Alice Lancaster spent in retirement. Even the busy tongue of Mrs. Nailor could find little to criticise in the young widow. To be sure, that accomplished critic made the most of this little, and disseminated her opinion that Alice's grief for Mr. Lancaster could only be remorse for her indifference to him during his life. Every one knew, she said, how she had neglected him.

The idea that Alice Lancaster was troubled with regrets was not as unfounded as the rest of Mrs. Nailor's ill-natured charge. She was attached to her husband, and had always meant to be a good wife to him.

She was as good a wife as her mother and her friends would permit her to be. Gossip had not spared some of her best friends. Even as proud a woman as young Mrs. Wentworth had not escaped. But Gossip had never yet touched the

name of Mrs. Lancaster, and Alice did not mean that it should. It was not unnatural that she should have accepted the liberty which her husband gave her and have gone out more and more, even though he could accompany her less and less.

No maelstrom is more unrelenting in its grasp than is that of Society. Only those who sink, or are cast aside by its seething waves, escape. And before she knew it, Alice Lancaster had found herself drawn into the whirlpool.

An attractive proposal had been made to her to go abroad and join some friends of hers for a London season a year or two before. Grinnell Rhodes had married Miss Creamer, who was fond of European society, and they had taken a house in London for the season, which promised to be very gay, and had suggested to Mrs. Lancaster to visit them. Mr. Lancaster had found himself unable to go. A good many matters of importance had been undertaken by him, and he must see them through, he said. Moreover, he had not been very well of late, and he had felt that he should be rather a drag amid the gayeties of the London season. Alice had offered to give up the trip, but he would not hear of it. She must go, he said, and he knew who

would be the most charming woman in London. So, having extracted from him the promise that, when his business matters were all arranged, he would join her for a little run on the Continent, she had set off for Paris, where "awful beauty puts on all its arms," to make her preparations for the campaign.

Mr. Lancaster had not told her of an interview which her mother had had with him, in which she had pointed out that Alice's health was suffering from her want of gayety and amusement. He was not one to talk of himself.

Alice Lancaster was still in Paris when a cable message announced to her Mr. Lancaster's death. It was only after his death that she awoke to the unselfishness of his life and to the completeness of his devotion to her.

His will, after making provision for certain charities with which he had been associated in his lifetime, left all his great fortune to her; and there was, besides, a sealed letter left for her in which he poured out his heart to her. From it she learned that he had suffered greatly and had known that he was liable to die at any time. He, however, would not send for her to come home, for fear of spoiling her holiday.

"I will not say I have not been lonely," he

wrote. "For God knows how lonely I have been since you left. The light went with you and will return only when you come home. Sometimes I have felt that I could not endure it and must send for you or go to you; but the first would have been selfishness and the latter a breach of duty. The times have been such that I have not felt it right to leave, as so many interests have been intrusted to me. . . . It is possible that I may never see your face again. I have made a will which I hope will please you. It will, at least, show you that I trust you entirely. I make no restrictions; for I wish you greater happiness than I fear I have been able to bring you. . . . In business affairs I suggest that you consult with Norman Wentworth, who is a man of high integrity and of a conservative mind. Should you wish advice as to good charities, I can think of no better adviser than Dr. Templeton. He has long been my friend."

In the first excess of her grief and remorse, Alice Lancaster came home and threw herself heart and soul into charitable work. As Mr. Lancaster had suggested, she consulted Dr. Templeton, the old rector of a small and unfashionable church on a side street. Under his guidance she found a world as new and as diverse

from that in which she had always lived as another planet would have been.

She found in some places a life where vice was esteemed more honorable than virtue, because it brought more bread. She found things of which she had never dreamed: things which appeared incredible after she had seen them. These things she found within a half-hour's walk of her sumptuous home; within a few blocks of the avenue and streets where Wealth and Plenty took their gay pleasure and where riches poured forth in a riot of splendid extravagance.

She would have turned back, but for the old clergyman's inspiring courage; she would have poured out her wealth indiscriminately, but for his wisdom—but for his wisdom and Norman Wentworth's.

"No, my dear," said the old man; "to give lavishly without discrimination is to put a premium on beggary and to subject yourself to imposture."

This Norman indorsed, and under their direction she soon found ways to give of her great means toward charities which were far-reaching and enduring. She learned also what happiness comes from knowledge of others and knowledge of how to help them.

It was surprising to her friends what a change

came over the young woman. Her point of view, her manner, her face, her voice changed. Her expression, which had once been so proud as to mar somewhat her beauty, softened; her manner increased in cordiality and kindness; her voice acquired a new and sincerer tone.

Even Mrs. Nailor observed that the enforced retirement appeared to have chastened the young widow, though she would not admit that it could be for anything than effect.

"Black always was the most bewilderingly becoming thing to her that I ever saw. Don't you remember those effects she used to produce with black and just a dash of red? Well, she wears black so deep you might think it was poor Mr. Lancaster's pall; but I have observed that whenever I have seen her there is always something red very close at hand. She either sits in a red chair, or there is a red shawl just at her back, or a great bunch of red roses at her elbow. I am glad that great window has been put up in old Dr. Templeton's church to William Lancaster's memory, or I am afraid it would have been but a small one."

Almost the first sign that the storm, which, as related, had struck New York would reach New Leeds was the shutting down of the Wick-

ersham mines. The *Clarion* stated that the shutting down was temporary and declared that in a very short time, when the men were brought to reason, they would be opened again; also that the Great Gun Mine, which had been flooded, would again be opened.

The mines belonging to Keith's company did not appear for some time to be affected; but the breakers soon began to reach even the point on which Keith had stood so securely. The first "roller" that came to him was when orders arrived to cut down the force, and cut down also the wages of those who were retained. This was done. Letters, growing gradually more and more complaining, came from the general office in New York.

Fortunately for Keith, Norman ran down at this time and looked over the properties again for himself. He did not tell Keith what bitter things were being said and that his visit down there was that he might be able to base his defence of Keith on facts in his own knowledge.

"What has become of Mrs. Lancaster?" asked Keith, casually. "Is she still abroad?"

"No; she came home immediately on hearing the news. You never saw any one so changed. She has gone in for charity."

Keith looked a trifle grim.

"If you thought her pretty as a girl, you ought to see her as a widow. She is ravishing."

"You are enthusiastic. I see that Wickersham has returned?"

Norman's brow clouded.

"He'd better not come back here," said Keith.

It is a trite saying that misfortunes rarely come singly, and it would not be so trite if there were not truth in it. Misfortunes are sometimes like blackbirds: they come in flocks.

Keith was on his way from his office in the town to the mines one afternoon, when, turning the shoulder of the hill that shut the opening of the mine from view, he became aware that something unusual had occurred. A crowd was already assembled about the mouth of the mine, above the tipple, among them many women; and people were hurrying up from all directions.

"What is it?" he demanded of the first person he came to.

"Water. They have struck a pocket or something, and the drift over toward the Wickersham line is filling up."

"Is everybody out?" Even as he inquired, Keith knew they were not.

"No, sir; all drowned."

Keith knew this could not be true. He hurried forward and pushed his way into the throng that crowded about the entrance. A gasp of relief went up as he appeared.

"Ah! Here's the boss." It was the expression of a vague hope that he might be able to do something. They gave way at his voice and stood back, many eyes turning on him in helpless appeal. Women, with blankets already in hand, were weeping aloud; children hanging to their skirts were whimpering in vague recognition of disaster; men were growling and swearing deeply.

"Give way. Stand back, every one." The calm voice and tone of command had their effect, and as a path was opened through the crowd, Keith recognized a number of the men who had been in and had just come out. They were all talking to groups about them. One of them gave him the first intelligent account of the trouble. They were working near the entrance when they heard the cries of men farther in, and the first thing they knew there was a rush of water which poured down on them, sweeping everything before it.

"It must have been a river," said one,

in answer to a question from Keith. "It was rising a foot a minute. The lights were all put out, and we just managed to get out in time."

According to their estimates, there were about forty men and boys still in the mine, most of them in the gallery off from the main drift. Keith was running over in his mind the levels. His face was a study, and the crowd about him watched him closely, as if to catch any ray of hope that he might hold out. As he reflected, his face grew whiter. Down the slant from the mine came the roar of the water. It was a desperate chance.

Half turning, he glanced at the white, stricken faces about him.

"It is barely possible some of the men may still be alive. There are two elevations. I am going down to see."

At the words, the sound through the crowd hushed suddenly.

"Na, th' ben't one alive," said an old miner, contentiously.

The murmur began again.

"I am going down to see," said Keith. "If one or two men will come with me, it will increase the chances of getting to them. If not,

I am going alone. But I don't want any one who has a family."

A dead silence fell, then three or four young fellows began to push their way through the crowd, amid expostulations of some of the women and the urging of others.

Some of the women seized them and held on to them.

"There are one or two places where men may have been able to keep their heads above water if it has not filled the drift, and that is what I am going to see," said Keith, preparing to descend.

"My brother's down there and I'll go," said a young light-haired fellow with a pale face. He belonged to the night shift.

"I ain't got any family," said a small, grizzled man. He had a thin black band on the sleeve of his rusty, brown coat.

Several others now came forward, amid mingled expostulations and encouragement; but Keith took the first two, and they prepared to enter. The younger man took off his silver watch, with directions to a friend to send it to his sister if he did not come back. The older man said a few words to a bystander. They were about a woman's grave on the hillside.

Keith took off his watch and gave it to one of the men, with a few words scribbled on a leaf from a memorandum-book, and the next moment the three volunteers, amid a deathly silence, entered the mine.

Long before they reached the end of the ascent to the shaft they could hear the water gurgling and lapping against the sides as it whirled through the gallery below them. As they reached the water, Keith let himself down into it. The water took him to about his waist and was rising.

"It has not filled the drift yet," he said, and started ahead. He gave a halloo; but there was no sound in answer, only the reverberation of his voice. The other men called to him to wait and talk it over. The strangeness of the situation appalled them. It might well have awed a strong man; but Keith waded on. The older man plunged after him, the younger clinging to the cage for a second in a panic. The lights were out in a moment. Wading and plunging forward through the water, which rose in places to his neck, and feeling his way by the sides of the drift, Keith waded forward through the pitch-darkness. He stopped at times to halloo; but there was no reply, only the strange hollow

sound of his own voice as it was thrown back on him, or died almost before leaving his throat. He had almost made up his mind that further attempt was useless and that he might as well turn back, when he thought he heard a faint sound ahead. With another shout he plunged forward again, and the next time he called he heard a cry of joy, and he pushed ahead again, shouting to them to come to him.

Keith found most of the men huddled together on the first level, in a state of panic. Some of them were whimpering and some were praying fervently, whilst a few were silent, in a sort of dazed bewilderment. All who were working in that part of the mine were there, they said, except three men, Bill Bluffy and a man named Hennson and his boy, who had been cut off in the far end of the gallery and who must have been drowned immediately, they told Keith.

"They may not be," said Keith. "There is one point as high as this. I shall go on and see."

The men endeavored to dissuade him. It was "a useless risk of life," they assured him; "the others must have been swept away immediately. The water had come so sudden. Besides, the water was rising, and it might even now be too late to get out." But Keith was firm, and order-

ing them back in charge of the two men who had come in with him, he pushed on alone. He knew that the water was still rising, though, he hoped, slowly. He had no voice to shout now, but he prayed with all his might, and that soothed and helped him. Presently the water was a little shallower. It did not come so high up on him. He knew from this that he must be reaching the upper level. Now and then he spoke Bluffy's and Hennson's names, lest in the darkness he should pass them.

Presently, as he stopped for a second to take breath, he thought he heard another sound besides the gurgling of the water as it swirled about the timbers. He listened intently.

It was the boy's voice. "Hold me tight, father. Don't leave me."

Then he heard another voice urging him to go. "You can't do any good staying; try it." But Hennson was refusing.

"Hold on. I won't leave you."

"Hennson! Bluffy!" shouted Keith, or tried to shout, for his voice went nowhere; but his heart was bounding now, and he plunged on. Presently he was near enough to catch their words. The father was praying, and the boy was following him.

"'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,'" Keith heard him say.

"Hennson!" he cried again.

From the darkness he heard a voice.

"Who is that? Is that any one?"

"It is I,—Mr. Keith,—Hennson. Come quick, all of you; you can get out. Cheer up."

A cry of joy went up.

"I can't leave my boy," called the man.

"Bring him on your back," said Keith. "Come on, Bluffy."

"I can't," said Bluffy. "I'm hurt. My leg is broke."

"God have mercy!" cried Keith, and waded on.

After a moment more he was up with the man, feeling for him in the darkness, and asking how he was hurt.

They told him that the rush of the water had thrown him against a timber and hurt his leg and side.

"Take the boy," said Bluffy, "and go on; leave me here."

The boy began to cry.

"No," said Keith; "I will take you, too: Hennson can take the boy. Can you walk at all?"

"I don't think so."

Keith made Hennson take the boy and hold on to him on one side, and slipping his arm around the injured man, he lifted him and they started back. He had put new courage into them, and the force of the current was in their favor. They passed the first high level, where he had found the others. When they reached a point where the water was too deep for the boy, Keith made the father take him on his shoulder, and they waded on through the blackness. The water was now almost up to his chin, and he grew so tired under his burden that he began to think they should never get out; but he fought against it and kept on, steadying himself against the timbers. He knew that if he went down it was the end. Many thoughts came to him of the past. He banished them and tried to speak words of encouragement, though he could scarcely hear himself.

"Shout," he said hoarsely; and the boy shouted, though it was somewhat feeble.

A moment later, he gave a shout of an entirely different kind.

"There is a light!" he cried.

The sound revived Keith's failing energies, and he tried to muster his flagging strength.

The boy shouted again, and in response there came back, strangely flattened, the shrill cry of a woman. Keith staggered forward with Bluffy, at times holding himself up by the side-timbers. He was conscious of a light and of voices, but was too exhausted to know more. If he could only keep the man and the boy above water until assistance came! He summoned his last atom of strength.

"Hold tight to the timbers, Hennson," he cried; "I am going."

The rest was a confused dream. He was conscious for a moment of the weight being lifted from him, and he was sinking into the water as if into a soft couch. He thought some one clutched him, but he knew nothing more.

Terpsichore was out on the street when the rumor of the accident reached her. Any accident always came home to her, and she was prompt to do what she could to help, in any case. But this was Mr. Keith's mine, and rumor had it that he was among the lost. Terpsichore was not attired for such an emergency; when she went on the streets, she still wore some of her old finery, though it was growing less and less of late. She always acted quickly. Calling to a

barkeeper who had come to his front door on hearing the news, to bring her brandy immediately, she dashed into a dry-goods store near by and got an armful of blankets, and when the clerk, a stranger just engaged in the store, made some question about charging them to her, she tore off her jewelled watch and almost flung it at the man.

"Take that, idiot! Men are dying," she said. "I have not time to box your jaws." And snatching up the blankets, she ran out, stopped a passing buggy, and flinging them into it, sprang in herself. With a nod of thanks to the barkeeper, who had brought out several bottles of brandy, she snatched the reins from the half-dazed driver, and heading the horse up the street that led out toward the mine, she lashed him into a gallop. She arrived at the scene of the accident just before the first men rescued reappeared. She learned of Keith's effort to save them. She would have gone into the mine herself had she not been restrained. Just then the men came out.

The shouts and cries of joy that greeted so unexpected a deliverance drowned everything else for a few moments; but as man after man was met and received half dazed into the arms

of his family and friends, the name of Keith began to be heard on all sides. One voice, however, was more imperative than the others; one figure pressed to the front—that of the gayly dressed woman who had just been comforting and encouraging the weeping women about the mine entrance.

"Where is Mr. Keith?" she demanded of man after man.

The men explained. "He went on to try and find three more men who are down there—Bluffy and Hennson and his boy."

"Who went with him?"

"No one. He went alone."

"And you men let him go?"

"We could not help it. He insisted. We tried to make him come with us."

"You cowards!" she cried, tearing off her wrap. "Of course, he insisted, for he is a *man*. Had one woman been down there, she would not have let him go alone." She sprang over the fencing rope as lightly as a deer, and started toward the entrance. A cry broke from the crowd.

"She's going! Stop her! She's crazy! Catch her!"

Several men sprang over the rope and started

after her. Hearing them, Terpsichore turned. With outstretched arms spread far apart and blazing eyes, she faced them.

"If any man tries to stop me, I will kill him on the spot, as God lives!" she cried, snatching up a piece of iron bar that lay near by. "I am going to find that man, dead or alive. If there is one of you man enough to come with me, come on. If not, I will go alone."

"I will go with you!" A tall, sallow-faced man who had just come up pushed through the throng and overtook her. "You stay here; I will go." It was Tib Drummond, the preacher. He was still panting. The girl hardly noticed him. She waved him aside and dashed on.

A dozen men offered to go if she would come back.

"No; I shall go with you," she said; and knowing that every moment was precious, and thinking that the only way to pacify her was to make the attempt, the men yielded, and a number of them entered the mine with her, the lank preacher among them.

They had just reached the bottom when the faint outline of something black was seen in the glimmer that their lights threw in the distance. Terpy, with a cry, dashed forward, and

was just in time to catch Keith as he sank beneath the black water.

When the rescuing party with their burdens reached the surface once more, the scene was one to revive even a flagging heart; but Keith and Bluffy were both too far gone to know anything of it.

The crowd, which up to this time had been buzzing with the excitement of the reaction following the first rescue, suddenly hushed down to an awed silence as Keith and Bluffy were brought out and were laid limp and unconscious on a blanket, which Terpsichore had snatched from a man in the front of the others. Many women pressed forward to offer assistance, but the girl waved them back.

"A doctor!" she cried, and reaching for a brandy-bottle, she pressed it first to Keith's lips. Turning to Drummond, the preacher, who stood gaunt and dripping above her, she cried fiercely: "Pray, man; if you ever prayed, pray now. Pray, and if you save 'em, I'll leave town. I swear before God I will. Tell Him so."

But the preacher needed no urging. Falling on his knees, he prayed as possibly he had never prayed before. In a few moments Keith began to come to. But Bluffy was still unconscious,

and a half-hour later the Doctor pronounced him past hope.

It was some time before Keith was able to rise from his bed, and during this period a number of events had taken place affecting him, and, more or less, affecting New Leeds. Among these was the sale of Mr. Plume's paper to a new rival which had recently been started in the place, and the departure of Mr. Plume (to give his own account of the matter) "to take a responsible position upon a great metropolitan journal." He was not a man, he said, "to waste his divine talents in the attempt to carry on his shoulders the blasted fortunes of a 'bursted boom,' when the world was pining for the benefit of his ripe experience." Another account of the same matter was that rumor had begun to connect Mr. Plume's name with the destruction of the Wickersham mine and the consequent disaster in the Rawson mine. His paper, with brazen effrontery, had declared that the accident in the latter was due to the negligence of the management. This was too much for the people of New Leeds in their excited condition. Bluffy was dead; but Hennson, the man whom Keith had rescued, had stated that they had

cut through into a shaft when the water broke in on them, and an investigation having been begun, not only of this matter, but of the previous explosion in the Wickersham mine, Mr. Plume had sold out his paper hastily and shaken the dust of New Leeds from his feet.

Keith knew nothing of this until it was all over. He was very ill for a time, and but for the ministrations of Dr. Balsam, who came up from Ridgely to look after him, and the care of a devoted nurse in the person of Terpsichore, this history might have ended then. Terpsichore had, immediately after Keith's accident, closed her establishment and devoted herself to his care. There were many other offers of similar service, for New Leeds was now a considerable town, and Keith might have had a fair proportion of the gentler sex to minister to him; but Dr. Balsam, to whom Terpsichore had telegraphed immediately after Keith's rescue, had, after his first interview with her in the sick-room, decided in favor of the young woman.

"She has the true instinct," said the Doctor to himself. "She knows when to let well enough alone, and holds her tongue."

Thus, when Keith was able to take notice again, he found himself in good hands.

A few days after he was able to get up, Keith received a telegram summoning him to New York to meet the officers of the company. As weak as he was, he determined to go, and, against the protestations of doctor and nurse, he began to make his preparations.

Just before Keith left, a visitor was announced, or rather announced himself, for Squire Rawson followed hard upon his knock at the door. His heavy boots, he declared, "were enough to let anybody know he was around, and give 'em time to stop anything they was ashamed o' doin'."

The squire had come over, as he said, "to hear about things." It was the first time he had seen Keith since the accident, though, after he had heard of it, he had written and invited Keith to come "and rest up a bit at his house."

When the old man learned of the summons that had come to Keith, he relit his pipe and puffed a moment in silence.

"Reckon they'll want to know why they ain't been a realizin' of their dreams?" he said, with a twinkle in his half-shut eyes. "Ever notice, when a man is huntin', if he gits what he aims at, it's himself; but if he misses, it's the blamed old gun?"

Keith smiled. He had observed that phenomenon.

"Well, I suspicionate they'll be findin' fault with their gun. I have been a-watchin' o' the signs o' the times. If they do, don't you say nothin' to them about it; but I'm ready to take back my part of the property, and I've got a leetle money I might even increase my herd with."

The sum he mentioned made Keith open his eyes.

"When hard times comes," continued the old man, after enjoying Keith's surprise, "I had rather have my money in land than in one of these here banks. I has seen wild-cat money and Confederate money, and land 's land. I don't know that it is much of a compliment to say that I has more confidence in you than I has in these here men what has come down from nobody-knows-where to open a bank on nobody-knows-what."

Keith expressed his appreciation of the compliment, but thought that they must have something to bank on.

"Oh, they've got something," admitted the capitalist. "But you know what it is. They bank on brass and credulity. That's what I calls it."

The old man's face clouded. "I had been puttin' that by for Phrony," he said. "But she didn't want it. *My* money warn't good enough for her. Some day she'll know better."

Keith waited for his humor to pass.

"I won't ever do nothin' for her; but if ever you see her, I'd like you to help her out if she needs it," he said huskily.

Keith promised faithfully that he would.

That afternoon Terpy knocked at his door, and came in with that mingled shyness and boldness which was characteristic of her.

Keith offered her a chair and began to thank her for having saved his life.

"Well, I am always becoming indebted to you anew for saving my life—"

"I didn't come for that," declared the girl. "I didn't save your life. I just went down to do what I could to help you. You know how that mine got flooded?"

"I do," said Keith.

"They done it to do you," she said; "and they made Bill believe it was to hurt Wickersham. Bill's dead now, an' I don't want you to think he had anything against you." She began to cry.

All this was new to Keith, and he said so.

"Well, you won't say anything about what

I said about Bill. J. Quincy made him think 'twas against Wickersham, and he was that drunk he didn't know what a fool they was makin' of him.—You are going away?" she said suddenly.

"Oh, only for a very little while—I am going off about a little business for a short time. I expect to be back very soon."

"Ah! I heard—I am glad to hear that you are coming back." She was manifestly embarrassed, and Keith was wondering more and more what she wanted of him. "I just wanted to say good-by. I am going away." She was fumbling at her wrap. "And to tell you I have changed my business. I'm not goin' to keep a dance-house any longer."

"I am glad of that," said Keith, and then stuck fast again.

"I don't think a girl ought to keep a dance-house or a bank?"

"No; I agree with you. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know; I thought of trying a milliner. I know right smart about hats; but I'd wear all the pretty ones and give all the ugly ones away," she said, with a poor little smile. "And it might interfere with Mrs. Gaskins, and she is

a widder. So I thought I'd go away. I thought of being a nurse—I know a little about that. I used to be about the hospital at my old home, and I've had some little experience since." She was evidently seeking his advice.

"You saved my life," said Keith. "Dr. Balsam says you are a born nurse."

She put this by without comment, and Keith went on.

"Where was your home?"

"Grofton."

"Grofton? You mean in England? In the West Country?"

She nodded. "Yes. I was the girl the little lady gave the doll to. You were there. Don't you remember? I ran away with it. I have it now—a part of it. They broke it up; but I saved the body."

Keith's eyes opened wide.

"That Lois Huntington gave it to?"

"Yes. I heard you were going to be married?" she said suddenly.

"I! Married! No! No such good luck for me." His laugh had an unexpected tone of bitterness in it. She gave him a searching glance in the dusk, and presently began again haltingly.

"I want you to know I am never going back to that any more."

"I am glad to hear it."

"You were the first to set me to thinkin' about it."

"I!"

"Yes; I want to live straight, and I'm goin' to."

"I am sure you are, and I cannot tell you how glad I am," he said cordially.

"Yes, thankee." She was looking down, picking shyly at the fringe on her wrap. "And I want you to know 'twas you done it. I have had a hard life—you don't know how hard—ever since I was a little bit of a gal—till I run away from home. And then 'twas harder. And they all treated me 's if I was just a—a dog, and the worst kind of a dog. So I lived like a dog. I learned how to bite, and then they treated me some better, because they found I would bite if they fooled with me. And then I learned what fools and cowards men were, and I used 'em. I used to love to play 'em, and I done it. I used to amuse 'em for money and hold 'em off. But I knew sometime I'd die like a dog as I lived like one—and then you came—." She paused and looked away out of

the window, and after a gulp went on again: "They preached at me for dancin'. But I don't think there's any harm dancin'. And I love it better'n anything else in the worl'."

"I do not, either," said Keith.

"You was the only one as treated me as if I was—some'n' I warn't. I fought against you and tried to drive you out, but you stuck, and I knew then I was beat. I didn't know 'twas you when I—made such a fool of myself that time—."

Keith laughed.

"Well, I certainly did not know it was you."

"No—I wanted you to know that," she went on gravely, "because—because, if I had, I wouldn' 'a' done it—for old times' sake." She felt for her handkerchief, and not finding it readily, suddenly caught up the bottom of her skirt and wiped her eyes with it as she might have done when a little girl.

Keith tried to comfort her with words of assurance, the tone of which was at least consoling.

"I always was a fool about crying—an' I was thinkin' about Bill," she said brokenly. "Good-by." She wrung his hand, turned, and walked rapidly out of the room, leaving Keith with a warm feeling about his heart.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DIRECTORS' MEETING

KEITH found, on his arrival in New York to meet his directors, that a great change had taken place in business circles since his visit there when he was getting up his company.

Even Norman, at whose office Keith called immediately on his arrival, appeared more depressed than Keith had ever imagined he could be. He looked actually care-worn.

As they started off to attend the meeting, Norman warned Keith that the meeting might be unpleasant for him, but urged him to keep cool, and not mind too much what might be said to him.

"I told you once, you remember, that men are very unreasonable when they are losing." He smiled gloomily.

Keith told him of old Rawson's offer.

"You may need it," said Norman.

When Keith and Norman arrived at the office

of the company, they found the inner office closed. Norman, being a director, entered at once, and finally the door opened and "Mr. Keith" was invited in. As he entered, a director was showing two men out of the room by a side door, and Keith had a glimpse of the back of one of them. The tall, thin figure suggested to him Mr. J. Quincy Plume; but he was too well dressed to be Mr. Plume, and Keith put the matter from his mind as merely an odd resemblance. The other person he did not see.

Keith's greeting was returned, as it struck him, somewhat coldly by most of them. Only two of the directors shook hands with him.

It was a meeting which Keith never forgot. He soon found that he had need of all of his self-control. He was cross-examined by Mr. Kestrel. It was evident that it was believed that he had wasted their money, if he had not done worse. The director sat with a newspaper in his lap, to which, from time to time, he appeared to refer. From the line of the questioning, Keith soon recognized the source of his information.

"You have been misled," Keith said coldly, in reply to a question. "I desire to know the authority for your statement."

"I must decline," was the reply. "I think I may say that it is an authority which is unimpeachable. You observe that it is one who knows what he is speaking of?" He gave a half-glance about him at his colleagues.

"A spy?" demanded Keith, coldly, his eye fixed on the other.

"No, sir. A man of position, a man whose sources of knowledge even you would not question. Why, this has been charged in the public prints without denial!" he added triumphantly.

"It has been charged in one paper," said Keith, "a paper which every one knows is for sale and has been bought—by your rival."

"It is based not only on the statement of the person to whom I have alluded, but is corroborated by others."

"By what others?" inquired Keith.

"By another," corrected Mr. Kestrel.

"That only proves that there are two men who are liars," said Keith, slowly. "I know but two men who I believe would have been guilty of such barefaced and brazen falsehoods. Shall I name them?"

"If you choose."

"They are F. C. Wickersham and a hireling of his, Mr. J. Quincy Plume."

There was a stir among the directors. Keith had named both men. It was a fortunate shot.

"By Jove! Brought down a bird with each barrel," said Mr. Yorke, who was one of the directors, to another in an undertone.

Keith proceeded to give the history of the mine and of its rival mine, the Wickersham property.

During the cross-examination Norman sat a silent witness. Beyond a look of satisfaction when Keith made his points clearly or countered on his antagonist with some unanswerable fact, he had taken no part in the colloquy. Up to this time Keith had not referred to him or even looked at him, but he glanced at him now, and the expression on his face decided Keith.

"Mr. Wentworth, there, knows the facts. He knows F. C. Wickersham as well as I do, and he has been on the ground."

There was a look of surprise on the face of nearly every one present. How could he dare to say it!

"Oh, I guess we all know him," said one, to relieve the tension.

Norman bowed his assent.

Mr. Kestrel shifted his position.

"Never mind Mr. Wentworth; it's *your* part

in the transaction that we are after," he said insolently.

The blood rushed to Keith's face; but a barely perceptible glance from Norman helped him to hold himself in check. The director glanced down at the newspaper.

"How about that accident in our mine? Some of us have thought that it was carelessness on the part of the local management. It has been charged that proper inspection would have indicated that the flooding of an adjacent mine should have given warning; in fact, had given warning." He half glanced around at his associates, and then fastened his eyes on Keith.

Keith's eyes met his unflinchingly and held them. He drew in his breath with a sudden sound, as a man might who has received a slap full in the face. Beyond this, there was no sound. Keith sat for a moment in silence. The blow had dazed him. In the tumult of his thought, as it returned, it seemed as if the noise of the stricken crowd was once more about him, weeping women and moaning men; and he was descending into the blackness of death. Once more the roar of that rushing water was in his ears; he was once more plunging through the darkness; once more he was being borne down into its

depths; again he was struggling, gasping, floundering toward the light; once more he returned to consciousness, to find himself surrounded by eyes full of sympathy—of devotion. The eyes changed suddenly. The present came back to him. Hostile eyes were about him.

Keith rose from his chair slowly, and slowly turned from his questioner toward the others.

"Gentlemen, I have nothing further to say to you. I have the honor to resign my position under you."

"Resign!" exclaimed the director who had been badgering him. "Resign your position!" He leaned back in his chair and laughed.

Keith turned on him so quickly that he pushed his chair back as if he were afraid he might spring across the table on him.

"Yes. Resign!" Keith was leaning forward across the table now, resting his weight on one hand. "Anything to terminate our association. I am no longer in your employ, Mr. Kestrel." His eyes had suddenly blazed, and held Mr. Kestrel's eyes unflinchingly. His voice was calm, but had the coldness of a steel blade.

There was a movement among the directors. They shifted uneasily in their chairs, and several of them pushed them back. They did not

know what might happen. Keith was the incarnation of controlled passion. Mr. Kestrel seemed to shrink up within himself. Norman broke the silence.

"I do not wonder that Mr. Keith should feel aggrieved," he said, with feeling. "I have held off from taking part in this interview up to the present, because I promised to do so, and because I felt that Mr. Keith was abundantly able to take care of himself; but I think that he has been unjustly dealt with and has been roughly handled."

Keith's only answer was a slow wave of the arm in protest toward Norman to keep clear of the contest and leave it to him. He was standing quite straight now, his eyes still resting upon Mr. Kestrel's face, with a certain watchfulness in them, as if he were expecting him to stir again, and were ready to spring on him should he do so.

Unheeding him, Norman went on.

"I know that much that he says is true." Keith looked at him quickly, his form stiffening. "And I believe that *all* that he says is true," continued Norman; "and I am unwilling to stand by longer and see this method of procedure carried on."

Keith bowed. There flashed across his mind the picture of a boy rushing up the hill to his rescue as he stood by a rock-pile on a hillside defending himself against overwhelming assailants, and his face softened.

"Well, I don't propose to be dictated to as to how I shall conduct my own business," put in Mr. Kestrel, in a sneering voice. When the spell of Keith's gaze was lifted from him he had recovered.

If Keith heard him now, he gave no sign of it, nor was it needed, for Norman turned upon him.

"I think you will do whatever this board directs," he said, with almost as much contempt as Keith had shown.

He took up the defence of the management to such good purpose that a number of the other directors went over to his side.

They were willing to acquit Mr. Keith of blame, they said, and to show their confidence in him. They thought it would be necessary to have some one to look after the property and prevent further loss until better times should come, and they thought it would be best to get Mr. Keith to remain in charge for the present.

During this time Keith had remained motion-

less and silent, except to bow his acknowledgments to Norman. He received their new expression of confidence in silence, until the discussion had ceased and the majority were on his side. Then he faced Mr. Yorke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am obliged to you for your expression; but it comes too late. Nothing on earth could induce me ever again to assume a position in which I could be subjected to what I have gone through this morning. I will never again have any business association with—" he turned and looked at Mr. Kestrel—"Mr. Kestrel, or those who have sustained him."

Mr. Kestrel shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, as to that," he laughed, "you need have no trouble. I shall get out as soon as I can. I have no more desire to associate with you than you have with me. All I want to do is to save what you mis—"

Keith's eyes turned on him quietly.

"—what I was misled into putting into your sink-hole down there. You may remember that you told me, when I went in, that you would guarantee me all I put in." His voice rose into a sneer.

"Oh, no. None of that, none of that!" inter-

rupted Norman, quickly. "You may remember, Mr. Kestrel,—?"

But Keith interrupted him with a wave of his hand.

"I do remember. I have a good memory, Mr. Kestrel."

"That was all done away with," insisted Norman, his arm outstretched toward Mr. Kestrel. "You remember that an offer was made you of your input and interest, and you declined?"

"I am speaking to *him,*" said Mr. Kestrel, not turning his eyes from Keith.

"I renew that offer now," said Keith, coldly.

"Then that's all right." Mr. Kestrel sat back in his chair. "I accept your proposal, principal and interest."

Protests and murmurs went around the board, but Mr. Kestrel did not heed them. Leaning forward, he seized a pen, and drawing a sheet of paper to him, began to scribble a memorandum of the terms, which, when finished, he pushed across the table to Keith.

Keith took it against Norman's protest, and when he had read it, picked up a pen and signed his name firmly.

"Here, witness it," said Mr. Kestrel to his

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next neighbor. "If any of the rest of you want to save your bones, you had better come in."

Several of the directors agreed with him.

Though Norman protested, Keith accepted their proposals, and a paper was drawn up which most of those present signed. It provided that a certain time should be given Keith in which to raise money to make good his offer, and arrangements were made provisionally to wind up the present company, and to sell out and transfer its rights to a new organization. Some of the directors prudently insisted on reserving the right to withdraw their proposals should they change their minds. It may be stated, however, that they had no temptation to do so. Times rapidly grew worse instead of better.

But Keith had occasion to know how sound was Squire Rawson's judgment when, a little later, another of the recurrent waves of depression swept over the country, and several banks in New Leeds went down, among them the bank in which old Rawson had had his money. The old man came up to town to remind Keith of his wisdom.

"Well, what do you think of brass and credulity now?" he demanded.

"Let me know when you begin to prophesy against me," said Keith, laughing.

"'Tain't no prophecy. It's jest plain sense. Some folks has it and some hasn't. When sense tells you a thing, hold on to it.

"Well, you jest go ahead and git things in shape, and don't bother about me. No use bein' in a hurry, neither. I have observed that when times gits bad, they generally gits worse. It's sorter like a fever; you've got to wait for the crisis and jest kind o' nurse 'em along. But I don't reckon that coal is goin' to run away. It has been there some time, accordin' to what that young man used to say, and if it was worth what they gin for it a few years ago, it's goin' to be worth more a few years hence. When a wheel keeps turnin', the bottom's got to come up sometime, and if we can stick we'll be there. I think you and I make a pretty good team. You let me furnish the ideas and you do the work, and we'll come out ahead o' some o' these Yankees yet. Jest hold your horses; keep things in good shape, and be ready to start when the horn blows. It's goin' to blow sometime."

The clouds that had begun to rest in Norman Wentworth's eyes and the lines that had written

themselves in his face were not those of business alone. Fate had brought him care of a deeper and sadder kind. Though Keith did not know it till later, the little rift within the lute, that he had felt, but had not understood, that first evening when he dined at Norman's house, had widened, and Norman's life was beginning to be overcast with the saddest of all clouds. Miss Abigail's keen intuition had discovered the flaw. Mrs. Wentworth had fallen a victim to her folly. Love of pleasure, love of admiration, love of display, had become a part of Mrs. Wentworth's life, and she was beginning to reap the fruits of her ambition.

For a time it was mighty amusing to her. To shop all morning, make the costliest purchases; to drive on the avenue or in the Park of an afternoon with the latest and most stylish turnout, in the handsomest toilet; to give the finest dinners; to spend the evening in the most expensive box; to cause men to open their eyes with admiration, and to make women grave with envy: all this gave her delight for a time—so much delight that she could not forego it even for her husband. Norman was so occupied of late that he could not go about with her as much as he had done. His father's health had failed,

and then he had died, throwing all the business on Norman.

Ferdy Wickersham had returned home from abroad not long before—alone. Rumor had connected his name while abroad with some woman—an unknown and very pretty woman had "travelled with him." Ferdy, being rallied by his friends about it, shook his head. "Must have been some one else." Grinnell Rhodes, who had met him, said she declared herself his wife. Ferdy's denial was most conclusive—he simply laughed.

To Mrs. Wentworth he had told a convincing tale. It was a slander. Norman was against him, he knew, but she, at least, would believe he had been maligned.

Wickersham had waited for such a time in the affairs of Mrs. Wentworth. He had watched for it; striven to bring it about in many almost imperceptible ways; had tendered her sympathy; had been ready with help as she needed it; till he began to believe that he was making some impression. It was, of all the games he played, the dearest just now to his heart. It had a double zest. It had appeared to the world that Norman Wentworth had defeated him. He had always defeated him—first as a boy, then at

college, and later when he had borne off the prize for which Ferdy had really striven. Ferdy would now show who was the real victor. If Louise Caldwell had passed him by for Norman Wentworth, he would prove that he still possessed her heart.

It was not long, therefore, before society found a delightful topic of conversation,—that silken-clad portion of society which usually deals with such topics,—the increasing intimacy between Ferdy Wickersham and Mrs. Wentworth.

Tales were told of late visits; of strolls in the dusk of evenings on unfrequented streets; of little suppers after the opera; of all the small things that deviltry can suggest and malignity distort. Wickersham cared little for having his name associated with that of any one, and he was certainly not going to be more careful for another's name than for his own. He had grown more reckless since his return, but it had not injured him with his set. It flattered his pride to be credited with the conquest of so cold and unapproachable a Diana as Louise Wentworth.

"What was more natural?" said Mrs. Nailor. After all, Ferdy Wickersham was her real ro-

mance, and she was his, notwithstanding all the attentions he had paid Alice Yorke. "Besides," said the amiable lady, "though Norman Wentworth undoubtedly lavishes large sums on his wife, and gives her the means to gratify her extravagant tastes, I have observed that he is seen quite as much with Mrs. Lancaster as with her, and any woman of spirit will resent this. You need not tell me that he would be so complacent over all that driving and strolling and box-giving that Ferdy does for her if he did not find his divertisement elsewhere."

Mrs. Nailor even went to the extent of rallying Ferdy on the subject.

"You are a naughty boy. You have no right to go around here making women fall in love with you as you do," she said, with that pretended reproof which is a real encouragement.

"One might suppose I was like David, who slew his tens of thousands," answered Ferdy. "Which of my victims are you attempting to rescue?"

"You know?"

As Ferdy shook his head, she explained further.

"I don't say that it isn't natural she should find you more—more—sympathetic than a man

who is engrossed in business when he is not engrossed in dangling about a pair of blue eyes; but you ought not to do it. Think of her."

"I thought you objected to my thinking of her?" said Mr. Wickersham, lightly.

Mrs. Nailor tapped him with her fan to show her displeasure.

"You are so provoking. Why won't you be serious?"

"Serious? I never was more serious in my life. Suppose I tell you I think of her all the time?" He looked at her keenly, then broke into a laugh as he read her delight in the speech. "Don't you think I am competent to attend to my own affairs, even if Louise Caldwell is the soft and unsophisticated creature you would make her? I am glad you did not feel it necessary to caution me about her husband?" His eyes gave a flash.

Mrs. Nailor hastened to put herself right—that is, on the side of the one present, for with her the absent was always in the wrong.

Wickersham improved his opportunities with the ability of a veteran. Little by little he excited Mrs. Wentworth's jealousy. Norman, he said, necessarily saw a great deal of Alice Lancaster, for he was her business agent. It was,

perhaps, not necessary for him to see her every day, but it was natural that he should. The arrow struck and rankled. And later, at an entertainment, when she saw Norman laughing and enjoying himself in a group of old friends, among whom was Alice Lancaster, Mrs. Norman was on fire with suspicion, and her attitude toward Alice Lancaster changed.

So, before Norman was aware of it, he found life completely changed for him. As a boatman on a strange shore in the night-time drifts without knowing of it, he, in the absorption of his business, drifted away from his old relation without marking the process. His wife had her life and friends, and he had his. He made at times an effort to recover the old relation, but she was too firmly held in the grip of the life she had chosen for him to get her back.

His wife complained that he was out of sympathy with her, and he could not deny it. She resented this, and charged him with neglecting her. No man will stand such a charge, and Norman defended himself hotly.

"I do not think it lies in your mouth to make such a charge," he said, with a flash in his eye. "I am nearly always at home when I am not necessarily absent. You can hardly say as much.

I do not think my worst enemy would charge me with that. Even Ferdy Wickersham would not say that."

She fired at the name.

"You are always attacking my friends," she declared. "I think they are quite as good as yours."

Norman turned away. He looked gloomily out of the window for a moment, and then faced his wife again.

"Louise," he said gravely, "if I have been hard and unsympathetic, I have not meant to be. Why can't we start all over again? You are more than all the rest of the world to me. I will give up whatever you object to, and you give up what I object to. That is a good way to begin." His eyes had a look of longing in them, but Mrs. Wentworth did not respond.

"You will insist on my giving up my friends," she said.

"Your friends? I do not insist on your giving up any friend on earth. Mrs. Nailor and her like are not your friends. They spend their time tearing to pieces the characters of others when you are present, and your character when you are absent. Wickersham is incapable of being a friend."

"You are always so unjust to him," said Mrs. Wentworth, warmly.

"I am not unjust to him. I have known him all my life, and I tell you he would sacrifice any one and every one to his pleasure."

Mrs. Wentworth began to defend him warmly, and so the quarrel ended worse than it had begun.

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. CREAMER'S BALL

THE next few years passed as the experience of old Rawson had led him to predict. Fortunes went down; but Fortune's wheel is always turning, and, as the old countryman said, "those that could stick would come up on top again."

Keith, however, had prospered. He had got the Rawson mine to running again, and even in the hardest times had been able to make it pay expenses. Other properties had failed and sold out, and had been bought in by Keith's supporters, when Wickersham once more appeared in New Leeds affairs. It was rumored that Wickersham was going to start again. Old Adam Rawson's face grew dark at the rumor. He said to Keith:

"If that young man comes down here, it's him or me. I'm an old man, and I ain't got long to live; but I want to live to meet him

once. If he's got any friends, they'd better tell him not to come." He sat glowering and puffing his pipe morosely.

Keith tried to soothe him; but the old fellow had received a wound that knew no healing.

"I know all you say, and I'm much obliged to you; but I can't accept it. It's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth with me. He has entered my home and struck me in the dark. Do you think I done all I have done jest for the money I was makin'! No; I wanted revenge. I have set on my porch of a night and seen her wanderin' about in them fureign cities, all alone, trampin' the streets—trampin', trampin', trampin'; tired, and, maybe, sick and hungry, not able to ask them outlandish folks for even a piece of bread—her that used to set on my knee and hug me with her little arms and call me granddad, and claim all the little calves for hers—jest the little ones; and that I've ridden many a mile over the mountains for, thinkin' how she was goin' to run out to meet me when I got home. And now even my old dog's dead—died after she went away.

"No!" he broke out fiercely. "If he comes back here, it's him or me! By the Lord! if he comes back here, I'll pay him the debt I owe

him. If she's his wife, I'll make her a widow, and if she ain't, I'll revenge her."

He mopped the beads of sweat that had broken out on his brow, and without a word stalked out of the door.

But Ferdy Wickersham had no idea of returning to New Leeds. He found New York quite interesting enough for him about this time.

The breach between Norman and his wife had grown of late.

Gossip divided the honors between them, and some said it was on Ferdy Wickersham's account; others declared that it was Mrs. Lancaster who had come between them. Yet others said it was a matter of money,—that Norman had become tired of his wife's extravagance and had refused to stand it any longer.

Keith knew vaguely of the trouble between Norman and his wife; but he did not know the extent of it, and he studiously kept up his friendly relations with her as well as with Norman. His business took him to New York from time to time, and he was sensible that the life there was growing more and more attractive for him. He was fitting into it too, and enjoying it more and more. He was like a strong

swimmer who, used to battling in heavy waves, grows stronger with the struggle, and finds ever new enjoyment and courage in his endeavor. He felt that he was now quite a man of the world. He was aware that his point of view had changed and (a little) that he had changed. As flattering as was his growth in New Leeds, he had a much more infallible evidence of his success in the favor with which he was being received in New York.

The favor that Mrs. Lancaster had shown Keith, and, much more, old Mrs. Wentworth's friendship, had a marked effect throughout their whole circle of acquaintance. That a man had been invited to these houses meant that he must be something. There were women who owned large houses, wore priceless jewels, cruised in their own yachts, had their own villas on ground as valuable as that which fronted the Roman Forum in old days, who would almost have licked the marble steps of those mansions to be admitted to sit at their dinner-tables and have their names appear in the Sunday issues of the newly established society journals among the blessed few. So, as soon as it appeared that Gordon was not only an acquaintance, but a friend of these critical

leaders, women who had looked over his head as they drove up the avenue, and had just tucked their chins and lowered their eyelids when he had been presented, began to give him invitations. Among these was Mrs. Nailor. Truly, the world appeared warmer and kinder than Keith had thought.

To be sure, it was at Mrs. Lancaster's that Mrs. Nailor met him, and Keith was manifestly on very friendly terms with the pretty widow. Even Mrs. Yorke, who was present on the occasion with her "heart," was impressively cordial to him. Mrs. Nailor had no idea of being left out. She almost gushed with affection, as she made a place beside her on a divan.

"You do not come to see all your friends," she said, with her winningest smile and her most bird-like voice. "You appear to forget that you have other friends in New York besides Mrs. Lancaster and Mrs. Yorke. Alice dear, you must not be selfish and engross all his time. You must let him come and see me, at least, sometimes. Yes?" This with a peculiarly innocent smile and tone.

Keith declared that he was in New York very rarely, and Mrs. Lancaster, with a slightly heightened color, repudiated the idea that she had anything to do with his movements.

"Oh, I hear of you here very often," declared Mrs. Nailor, roguishly. "I have a little bird that brings me all the news about my friends."

"A little bird, indeed!" said Alice to herself, and to Keith later. "I'll be bound she has not. If she had a bird, the old cat would have eaten it."

"You are going to the Creamer's ball, of course?" pursued Mrs. Nailor.

No, Keith said: he was not going; he had been in New York only two days, and, somehow, his advent had been overlooked. He was always finding himself disappointed by discovering that New York was still a larger place than New Leeds.

"Oh, but you must go! We must get you an invitation, mustn't we, Alice?" Mrs. Nailor was always ready to promise anything, provided she could make her engagement in partnership and then slip out and leave the performance to her friend.

"Why, yes; there is not the least trouble about getting an invitation. Mrs. Nailor can get you one easily."

Keith looked acquiescent.

"No, my dear; you write the note. You know Mrs. Creamer every bit as well as I," protested Mrs. Nailor, "and I have already asked for at

least a dozen. There are Mrs. Wyndham and Lady Stobbs, who were here last winter; and that charming Lord Huckster, who was at Newport last summer; and I don't know how many more—so you will have to get the invitation for Mr. Keith."

Keith, with some amusement, declared that he did not wish any trouble taken; he had only said he would go because Mrs. Nailor had appeared to desire it so much.

Next morning an invitation reached Keith,—he thought he knew through whose intervention,—and he accepted it.

That evening, as Keith, about dusk, was going up the avenue on his way home, a young girl passed him, walking very briskly. She paused for a moment just ahead of him to give some money to a poor woman who, doubled up on the pavement in a black shawl, was grinding out from a wheezy little organ a thin, dirge-like strain.

"Good evening. I hope you feel better today," Keith heard her say in a kind tone, though he lost all of the other's reply except the "God bless you."

She was simply dressed in a plain, dark walking-suit, and something about her quick, elastic

step and slim, trim figure as she sailed along, looking neither to the right nor to the left, attracted his attention. Her head was set on her shoulders in a way that gave her quite an air, and as she passed under a lamp the light showed the flash of a fine profile and an unusual face. She carried a parcel in her hand that might have been a roll of music, and from the lateness of the hour Keith fancied her a shop-girl on her way home, or possibly a music-teacher.

Stirred by the glimpse of the refined face, and even more by the carriage of the little head under the dainty hat, Keith quickened his pace to obtain another glance at her. He had almost overtaken her when she stopped in front of a well-lighted window of a music-store. The light that fell on her face revealed to him a face of unusual beauty. Something about her graceful pose as, with her dark brows slightly knitted, she bent forward and scanned intently the pieces of music within, awakened old associations in Keith's mind, and sent him back to his boyhood at Elphinstone. And under an impulse, which he could better justify to himself than to her, he did a very audacious and improper thing. Taking off his hat, he spoke to her. She had been so absorbed that for a moment she did not

comprehend that it was she he was addressing. Then, as it came to her that it was she to whom this stranger was speaking, she drew herself up and gave him a look of such withering scorn that Keith felt himself shrink. Next second, with her head high in the air, she had turned without a word and sped up the street, leaving Keith feeling very cheap and subdued.

But that glance from dark eyes flashing with indignation had filled Keith with a sensation to which he had long been a stranger. Something about the simple dress, the high-bred face with its fine scorn; something about the patrician air of mingled horror and contempt, had suddenly cleaved through the worldly crust that had been encasing him for some time, and reaching his better self, awakened an emotion that he had thought gone forever. It was like a lightning-flash in the darkness. He knew that she had entered his life. His resolution was taken on the instant. He would meet her, and if she were what she looked to be—again Elphinstone and his youth swept into his mind. He already was conscious of a sense of protection; he felt curiously that he had the right to protect her. If he had addressed her, might not others do so? The thought made his blood boil. He almost wished

that some one would attempt it, that he might assert his right to show her what he was, and thus retrieve himself in her eyes. Besides, he must know where she lived. So he followed her at a respectful distance till she ran up the steps of one of the better class of houses and disappeared within. He was too far off to be able to tell which house it was that she entered, but it was in the same block with Norman Wentworth's house.

Keith walked the avenue that night for a long time, pondering how he should find and explain his conduct to the young music-teacher, for a music-teacher he had decided she must be. The next evening, too, he strolled for an hour on the avenue, scanning from a distance every fair passer-by, but he saw nothing of her.

Mrs. Creamer's balls were, as Norman had once said, *the* balls of the season. "Only the rich and the noble were expected."

Mrs. Creamer's house was one of the great, new, brownstone mansions which had been built within the past ten years upon "the avenue." It had cost a fortune. Within, it was so sumptuous that a special work has been "gotten up,"

printed, and published by subscription, of its "art treasures," furniture, and upholstery.

Into this palatial residence—for flattery could not have called it a home—Keith was admitted, along with some hundreds of other guests.

To-night it was filled with, not flowers exactly, but with floral decorations; for the roses and orchids were lost in the designs—garlands, circles, and banks formed of an infinite number of flowers.

Mrs. Creamer, a large, handsome woman with good shoulders, stood just inside the great drawing-room. She was gorgeously attired and shone with diamonds until the eyes ached with her splendor. Behind her stood Mr. Creamer, looking generally mightily bored. Now and then he smiled and shook hands with the guests, at times drawing a friend out of the line back into the rear for a chat, then relapsing again into indifference or gloom.

Keith was presented to Mrs. Creamer. She only nodded to him. Keith moved on. He soon discovered that a cordial greeting to a strange guest was no part of the convention in that society. One or two acquaintances spoke to him, but he was introduced to no one; so he sauntered about and entertained himself observing the peo-

ple. The women were in their best, and it was good.

Keith was passing from one room to another when he became aware that a man, who was standing quite still in the doorway, was, like himself, watching the crowd. His face was turned away; but something about the compact figure and firm chin was familiar to him. Keith moved to take a look at his face. It was Dave Dennison.

He had a twinkle in his eye as he said: "Didn't expect to see me here?"

"Didn't expect to see myself here," said Keith.

"I'm one of the swells now"; and Dave glanced down at his expensive shirt-front and his evening suit with complacency. "Wouldn't Jake give a lot to have such a bosom as that? I think I look just as well as some of 'em?" he queried, with a glance about him.

Keith thought so too. "You are dressed for the part," he said. Keith's look of interest inspired him to go on.

"You see, 'tain't like 'tis down with us, where you know everybody, and everything about him, to the number of drinks he can carry."

"Well, what do you do here?" asked Keith,

who was trying to follow Mr. Dennison's calm eye as, from time to time, it swept the rooms, resting here and there on a face or following a hand. He was evidently not merely a guest.

"Detective."

"A detective!" exclaimed Keith.

Dave nodded. "Yes; watchin' the guests, to see they don't carry off each other. It is the new ones that puzzle us for a while," he added. "Now, there is a lady acting very mysteriously over there." His eye swept over the room and then visited, in that casual way it had, some one in the corner across the room. "I don't just seem to make her out. She looks all right—but—?"

Keith followed the glance, and the blood rushed to his face and then surged back again to his heart, for there, standing against the wall, was the young girl whom he had spoken to on the street a few evenings before, who had given him so merited a rebuff. She was a patrician-looking creature and was standing quite alone, observing the scene with keen interest. Her girlish figure was slim; her eyes, under straight dark brows, were beautiful; and her mouth was almost perfect. Her fresh face expressed unfeigned interest, and though gen-

erally grave as she glanced about her, she smiled at times, evidently at her own thoughts.

"I don't just make her out," repeated Mr. Dennison, softly. "I never saw her before, as I remember, and yet—?" He looked at her again.

"Why, I do not see that she is acting at all mysteriously," said Keith. "I think she is a music-teacher. She is about the prettiest girl in the room. She may be a stranger, like myself, as no one is talking to her."

"Don't no stranger git in here," said Mr. Dennison, decisively. "You see how different she is from the others. Most of them don't think about anything but themselves. She ain't thinkin' about herself at all; she is watchin' others. She may be a reporter—she appears mighty interested in clothes."

"A reporter!"

The surprise in Keith's tone amused his old pupil. "Yes, a sassiety reporter. They have curious ways here. Why, they pay money to git themselves in the paper."

Just then so black a look came into his face for a second that Keith turned and followed his glance. It rested on Ferdy Wickersham, who

was passing at a little distance, with Mrs. Wentworth on his arm.

"There 's one I am watchin' on my own account," said the detective. "I'm comin' up with him, and some day I'm goin' to light on him." His eye gave a flash and then became as calm and cold as usual. Presently he spoke again:

"I don't forgit nothin'—'pears like I can't do it." His voice had a new subtone in it, which somehow sent Keith's memory back to the past. "I don't forgit a kindness, anyway," he said, laying his hand for a second on Keith's arm. "Well, see you later, sir." He moved slowly on. Keith was glad that patient enemy was not following him.

Keith's inspection of the young girl had inflamed his interest. It was an unusual face—high-bred and fine. Humor lurked about the corners of her mouth; but resolution also might be read there. And Keith knew how those big, dark eyes could flash. And she was manifestly having a good time all to herself. She was dressed much more simply than any other woman he saw, in a plain muslin dress; but she made a charming picture as she stood against the wall, her dark eyes alight with interest. Her

brown hair was drawn back from a brow of snowy whiteness, and her little head was set on her shoulders in a way that recalled to Keith an old picture. She would have had an air of distinction in any company. Here she shone like a jewel.

Keith's heart went out to her. At sight of her his youth appeared to flood over him again. Keith fancied that she looked weary, for every now and then she lifted her head and glanced about the rooms as though looking for some one. A sense of protection swept over him. He must meet her. But how? She did not appear to know any one. Finally he determined on a bold expedient. If he succeeded it would give him a chance to recover himself as nothing else could; if he failed he could but fail. So he made his way over to her. But it was with a beating heart.

"You look tired. Won't you let me get you a chair?" His voice sounded strange even to himself.

"No, thank you; I am not tired." She thanked him civilly enough, but scarcely looked at him. "But I should like a glass of water."

"It is the only liquid I believe I cannot get you," said Keith. "There are three places

where water is scarce: the desert, a ball-room, and the other place where Dives was."

She drew herself up a little.

"But I will try," he added, and went off. On his return with a glass of water, she took it.

As she handed the glass back to him, she glanced at him, and he caught her eye. Her head went up, and she flushed to the roots of her brown hair.

"Oh!—I beg your pardon! I—I—really—I don't— Thank you very much. I am very sorry." She turned away stiffly.

"Why?" said Keith, flushing in spite of himself. "You have done me a favor in enabling me to wait on you. May I introduce myself? And then I will get some one to do it in person —Mrs. Lancaster or Mrs. Wentworth. They will vouch for me."

The girl looked up at him, at first with a hostile expression on her face, which changed suddenly to one of wonder.

"Isn't this Gordon Keith?"

Gordon's eyes opened wide. How could she know him?

"Yes."

"You don't know me?" Her eyes were dancing now, and two dimples were flitting about her

mouth. Keith's memory began to stir. She put her head on one side.

" 'Lois, if you'll kiss me I'll let you ride my horse,' " she said cajolingly.

"Lois Huntington! It can't be!" exclaimed Keith, delighted. "You are just so high." Keith measured a height just above his left watch-pocket. "And you have long hair down your back."

With a little twist she turned her head and showed him a head of beautiful brown hair done up in a Grecian knot just above the nape of a shapely little neck.

"—And you have the brightest—"

She dropped her eyes before his, which were looking right into them—though not until she had given a little flash from them, perhaps to establish their identity.

"—And you used to say I was your sw—"

"Did I?" (this was very demurely said). "How old was I then?"

"How old are you now?"

"Eighteen," with a slight straightening of the slim figure.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Keith, enjoying keenly the picture she made.

"All of it," with a flash of the eyes.

"For me you are just all of seven years old."

"Do you know who I thought you were?" Her face dimpled.

"Yes; a waiter!"

She nodded brightly.

"It was my good manners. The waiters have struck me much this evening," said Keith.

She smiled, and the dimples appeared again.

"That is their business. They are paid for it."

"Oh, I see. Is that the reason others are—what they are? Well, I am more than paid. My recompense is—you."

She looked pleased. "You are the first person I have met!—Did you have any idea who I was the other evening?" she asked suddenly.

Keith would have given five years of his life to be able to answer yes. But he said no. "I only knew you were some one who needed protection," he said, trying to make the best of a bad situation. You are too young to be on the street so late."

"So it appeared. I had been out for a walk to see old Dr. Templeton and to get a piece of music, and it was later than I thought."

"Whom are you here with?" inquired Keith,

to get off of delicate ground. "Where are you staying?"

"With my cousin, Mrs. Norman Wentworth. It is my first introduction into New York life."

Just then there was a movement toward the supper-room.

Keith suggested that they should go and find Mrs. Norman. Miss Huntington said, however, she thought she had better remain where she was, as Mrs. Norman had promised to come back.

"I hope she will invite you to join our party," she said naïvely.

"If she does not, I will invite you both to join mine," declared Keith. "I have no idea of letting you escape for another dozen years."

Just then, however, Mrs. Norman appeared. She was with Ferdy Wickersham, who, on seeing Keith, looked away coldly. She smiled, greatly surprised to find Keith there. "Why, where did you two know each other?"

They explained.

"I saw you were pleasantly engaged, so I did not think it necessary to hasten back," she said to Lois.

Ferdy Wickersham said something to her in

an undertone, and she held out her hand to the girl.

"Come, we are to join a party in the supper-room. We shall see you after supper, Mr. Keith?"

Keith said he hoped so. He was conscious of a sudden wave of disappointment sweeping over him as the three left him. The young girl gave him a bright smile.

Later, as he passed by, he saw only Ferdy Wickersham with Mrs. Norman. Lois Huntington was at another table, so Keith joined her.

After the supper there was to be a novel kind of entertainment: a sort of vaudeville show in which were to figure a palmist, a gentleman set down in the programme with its gilt printing as the "Celebrated Professor Cheireman"; several singers; a couple of acrobatic performers; and a danseuse: "Mlle. Terpsichore."

The name struck Keith with something of sadness. It recalled old associations, some of them pleasant, some of them sad. And as he stood near Lois Huntington, on the edge of the throng that filled the large apartment where the stage had been constructed, during the first three or four numbers he was rather more in Gumbolt than in that gay company in that brilliant room.

"Professor Cheireman" had shown the wonders of the trained hand and the untrained mind in a series of tricks that would certainly be wonderful did not so many men perform them.

Mlle. de Voix performed hardly less wonders with her voice, running up and down the scale like a squirrel in a cage, introducing trills into songs where there were none, and making the simplest melodies appear as intricate as pieces of opera. The Burlystone Brothers jumped over and skipped under each other in a marvellous and "absolutely unrivalled manner." And presently the danseuse appeared.

Keith was standing against the wall thinking of Terpy and the old hall with its paper hangings in Gumbolt, and its benches full of eager, jovial spectators, when suddenly there was a roll of applause, and he found himself in Gumbolt. From the side on which he stood walked out his old friend, Terpy herself. He had not been able to see her until she was well out on the stage and was making her bow. The next second she began to dance.

After the first greeting given her, a silence fell on the room, the best tribute they could pay to her art, her grace, her abandon. Nothing so audacious had ever been seen by certainly half

the assemblage. Casting aside the old tricks of the danseuse, the tipping and pirouetting and grimacing for applause, the dancer seemed oblivious of her audience and as though she were trying to excel herself. She swayed and swung and swept from side to side as though on wings.

Round after round of applause swept over the room. Men were talking in undertones to each other; women buzzed behind their fans.

She stopped, panting and flushed with pride, and with a certain scorn in her face and mien glanced over the audience. Just as she was poising herself for another effort, her eye reached the side of the room where Keith stood just beside Miss Huntington. A change passed over her face. She nodded, hesitated for a second, and then began again. She failed to catch the time of the music and danced out of time. A titter came from the rear of the room. She looked in that direction, and Keith did the same. Ferdy Wickersham, with a malevolent gleam in his eye, was laughing. The dancer flushed deeply, frowned, lost her self-possession, and stopped. A laugh of derision sounded at the rear.

"For shame! It is shameful!" said Lois Huntington in a low voice to Keith.

"It is. The cowardly scoundrel!" He turned and scowled at Ferdy.

At the sound, Terpy took a step toward the front, and bending forward, swept the audience with her flashing eyes.

"Put that man out."

A buzz of astonishment and laughter greeted her outbreak.

"Cackle, you fools!"

She turned to the musicians.

"Play that again and play it right, or I'll wring your necks!"

She began to dance again, and soon danced as she had done at first.

Applause was beginning again; but at the sound she stopped, looked over the audience disdainfully, and turning, walked coolly from the stage.

"Who is she?" "Well, did you ever see anything like that!" "Well, I never did!" "The insolent creature!" "By Jove! she can dance if she chooses!" buzzed over the room.

"Good for her," said Keith, his face full of admiration.

"Did you know her?" asked Miss Huntington.

"Well."

The girl said nothing, but she stiffened and changed color slightly.

"You know her, too," said Keith.

"I! I do not."

"Do you remember once, when you were a tot over in England, giving your doll to a little dancing-girl?—When your governess was in such a temper?"

Lois nodded.

"That is she. She used to live in New Leeds. She was almost the only woman in Gumbolt when I went there. Had a man laughed at her there then, he would never have left the room alive. Mr. Wickersham tried it once, and came near getting his neck broken for it. He is getting even with her now."

As the girl glanced up at him, his face was full of suppressed feeling. A pang shot through her.

Just then the entertainment broke up and the guests began to leave. Mrs. Wentworth beckoned to Lois. Wickersham was still with her.

"I will not trust myself to go within speaking distance of him now," said Keith; "so I will say good-by, here." He made his adieus somewhat hurriedly, and moved off as Mrs. Wentworth approached.

Wickersham, who, so long as Keith remained with Miss Huntington, had kept aloof, and was about to say good night to Mrs. Wentworth, had, on seeing Keith turn away, followed Mrs. Wentworth.

Every one was still chatting of the episode of the young virago.

"Well, what did you think of your friend's friend?" asked Wickersham of Lois.

"Of whom?"

"Of your friend Mr. Keith's young lady. She is an old flame of his," he said, turning to Mrs. Wentworth and speaking in an undertone, just loud enough for Lois to hear. "They have run her out of New Leeds, and I think he is trying to force her on the people here. He has cheek enough to do anything; but I think to-night will about settle him."

"I do not know very much about such things; but I think she dances very well," said Lois, with heightened color, moved to defend the girl under an instinct of opposition to Wickersham.

"So your friend thinks, or thought some time ago," said Wickersham. "My dear girl, she can't dance at all. She is simply a disreputable young woman, who has been run out of her own town, as she ought to be run out of this, as an

impostor, if nothing else." He turned to Mrs. Wentworth: "A man who brought such a woman to a place like this ought to be kicked out of town."

"If you are speaking of Mr. Keith, I don't believe that of him," said Lois, coldly.

Wickersham looked at her for a moment. A curious light was in his eyes as he said:

"I am not referring to any one. I am simply generalizing." He shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

As Mrs. Wentworth and Lois entered their carriage, a gentleman was helping some one into a hack just behind Mrs. Wentworth's carriage. The light fell on them at the moment that Lois stepped forward, and she recognized Mr. Keith and the dancer, Mlle. Terpsichore. He was handing her in with all the deference that he would have shown the highest lady in the land.

Lois Huntington drove home in a maze. Life appeared to have changed twice for her in a single evening. Out of that crowd of strangers had come one who seemed to be a part of her old life. They had taken each other up just where they had parted. The long breach in their lives had been bridged. He had seemed the old friend and champion of her childhood, who, since her

aunt had revived her recollection of him, had been a sort of romantic hero in her dreams. Their meeting had been such as she had sometimes pictured to herself it would be. She believed him finer, higher, than others. Then, suddenly, she had found that the vision was but an idol of clay. All that her aunt had said of him had been dashed to pieces in a trice. He was not worthy of her notice. He was not a gentleman. He was what Mr. Wickersham had called him. He had boasted to her of his intimacy with a common dancing-girl. He had left her to fly to her and escort her home.

As Keith had left the house, Terpsichore had come out of the side entrance, and they had met. Keith was just wondering how he could find her, and he considered the meeting a fortunate one. She was in a state of extreme agitation. It was the first time that she had undertaken to dance at such an entertainment. She had refused, but had been over-persuaded, and she declared it was all a plot between Wickersham and her manager to ruin her. She would be even with them both, if she had to take a pistol to right her wrongs.

Keith had little idea that the chief motive of her acceptance had been the hope that she might

find him among the company. He did what he could to soothe her, and having made a promise to call upon her, he bade her good-by, happily ignorant of the interpretation which she who had suddenly sprung uppermost in his thoughts had, upon Wickersham's instigation, put upon his action.

Keith walked home with a feeling to which he had been long a stranger. He was somehow happier than he had been in years. A young girl had changed the whole entertainment for him—the whole city—almost his whole outlook on life. He had not felt this way for years—not since Alice Yorke had darkened life for him. Could love be for him again?

The dial appeared to have turned back for him. He felt younger, fresher, more hopeful. He walked out into the street and tried to look up at the stars. The houses obscured them; they were hardly visible. The city streets were no place for stars and sentiment. He would go through the park and see them. So he strolled along and turned into a park. The gas-lamps shed a yellow glow on the trees, making circles of feeble light on the walks, and the shadows lay deep on the ground. Most of the benches were vacant; but here and there a waif

or a belated home-goer sat in drowsy isolation. The stars were too dim even from this vantage-ground to afford Keith much satisfaction. His thoughts flew back to the mountains and the great blue canopy overhead, spangled with stars, and a blue-eyed girl amid pillows whom he used to worship. An arid waste of years cut them off from the present, and his thoughts came back to a sweet-faced girl with dark eyes, claiming him as her old friend. She appeared to be the old ideal rather than the former.

All next day Keith thought of Lois Huntington. He wanted to go and see her; but he waited until the day after. He would not appear too eager.

He called at Norman's office for the pleasure of talking of her; but Norman was still absent. The following afternoon he called at Norman's house. The servant said Mrs. Norman was out.

"Miss Huntington?"

"She left this morning."

Keith walked up the street feeling rather blank. That night he started for the South. But Lois Huntington was much in his thoughts. He wondered if life would open for him again. When a man wonders about this, life has already opened.

By the time he reached New Leeds, he had already made up his mind to write and ask Miss Abby for an invitation to Brookford, and he wrote his father a full account of the girl he had known as a child, over which the old General beamed.

He forgave people toward whom he had hard feelings. The world was better than he had been accounting it. He even considered more leniently than he had done Mrs. Wentworth's allowing Ferdy Wickersham to hang around her. It suddenly flashed on him that, perhaps, Ferdy was in love with Lois Huntington. Crash! went his kind feelings, his kind thoughts. The idea of Ferdy making love to that pure, sweet, innocent creature! It was horrible! Her innocence, her charming friendliness, her sweetness, all swept over him, and he thrilled with a sense of protection.

Could he have known what Wickersham had done to poison her against him, he would have been yet more enraged. As it was, Lois was at that time back at her old home; but with how different feelings from those which she had had but a few days before! Sometimes she hated Keith, or, at least, declared to herself that she hated him; and at others she defended him

against her own charge. And more and more she truly hated Wickersham.

"So you met Mr. Keith?" said her aunt, abruptly, a day or two after her return. "How did you like him?"

"I did not like him," said Lois, briefly, closing her lips with a snap, as if to keep the blood out of her cheeks.

"What! you did not like him? Girls are strange creatures nowadays. In my time, a girl —a girl like you—would have thought him the very pink of a man. I suppose you liked that young Wickersham better?" she added grimly.

"No, I did not like him either. But I think Mr. Keith is perfectly horrid."

"Horrid!" The old lady's black eyes snapped. "Oh, he didn't ask you to dance! Well, I think, considering he knew you when you were a child, and knew you were my niece, he might—"

"Oh, yes, I danced with him; but he is not very nice. He—ah— Something I saw prejudiced me."

Miss Abby was so insistent that she should tell her what had happened that she yielded.

"Well, I saw him on the street helping a woman into a carriage."

"A woman? And why shouldn't he help her in? He probably was the only man you saw that would do it, if you saw the men I met."

"A dis—reputable woman," said Lois, slowly.

"And, pray, what do you know of disreputable women? Not that there are not enough of them to be seen!"

"Some one told me—and she looked it," said Lois, blushing. The old lady unexpectedly whipped around and took her part so warmly that Lois suddenly found herself defending Gordon. She could not bear that others should attack him, though she took frequent occasion to tell herself that she hated him. In fact, she hated him so that she wanted to see him to show him how severe she would be.

The occasion might have come sooner than she expected; but alas! Fate was unkind.

Keith was not conscious until he found that Lois Huntington had left town how much he had thought of her. Her absence appeared suddenly to have emptied the city. By the time he had reached his room he had determined to follow her home. That rift of sunshine which had entered his life should not be shut out again. He sat down and wrote to her: a friendly letter, expressing warmly his pleasure at having met

her, picturing jocularly his disappointment at having failed to find her. He made a single allusion to the Terpsichore episode. He had done what he could, he said, to soothe his friend's ruffled feelings; but, though he thought he had some influence with her, he could not boast of having had much success in this.

In the light in which Lois read this letter, the allusion to the dancing-girl outweighed all the rest, and though her heart had given a leap when she first saw that she had a letter from Keith, when she laid it down her feeling had changed. She would show him that she was not a mere country chit to be treated as he had treated her. His "friend" indeed!

When Keith, to his surprise, received no reply to his letter, he wrote again more briefly, asking if his former letter had been received; but this shared the fate of the first.

Meantime Lois had gone off to visit a friend. Her mind was not quite as easy as it should have been. She felt that if she had it to go over, she would do just the same thing; but she began to fancy excuses for Keith. She even hunted up the letters he had written her as a boy.

It is probable that Lois's failure to write did more to raise her in Keith's estimation and fix

her image in his mind than anything else she could have done. Keith knew that something untoward had taken place, but what it was he could not conceive. At least, however, it proved to him that Lois Huntington was different from some of the young women he had met of late. So he sat down and wrote to Miss Brooke, saying that he was going abroad on a matter of importance, and asking leave to run down and spend Sunday with them before he left. Miss Brooke's reply nearly took his breath away. She not only refused his request, but intimated that there was a good reason why his former letters had not been acknowledged and why he would not be received by her.

It was rather incoherent, but it had something to do with "inexplicable conduct." On this Keith wrote Miss Brooke, requesting a more explicit charge and demanding an opportunity to defend himself. Still he received no reply; and, angry that he had written, he took no further steps about it.

By the time Lois reached home she had determined to answer his letter. She would write him a severe reply.

Miss Abby, however, announced to Lois, the day of her return, that Mr. Keith had written

asking her permission to come down and see them. The blood sprang into Lois's face, and if Miss Abby had had on her spectacles at that moment, she must have read the tale it told.

"Oh, he did! And what —?" She gave a swallow to restrain her impatience. "What did you say to him, Aunt Abby? Have you answered the letter?" This was very demurely said.

"Yes. Of course, I wrote him not to come. I preferred that he should not come."

Could she have but seen Lois's face!

"Oh, you did!"

"Yes. I want no hypocrites around me." Her head was up and her cap was bristling. "I came very near telling him so, too. I told him that I had it from good authority that he had not behaved in altogether the most gentlemanly way—consorting openly with a hussy on the street! I think he knows whom I referred to."

"But, Aunt Abby, I do not know that she was. I only heard she was," defended Lois.

"Who told you?"

"Mr. Wickersham."

"Well, *he* knows," said Miss Abigail, with decision. "Though I think he had very little to do to discuss such matters with you."

"But, Aunt Abby, I think you had better have let him come. We could have shown him our disapproval in our manner. And possibly he might have some explanation?"

"I guess he won't make any mistake about that. The hypocrite! To sit up and talk to me as if he were a bishop! I have no doubt he would have explanation enough. They always do."

CHAPTER XXIII

GENERAL KEITH VISITS STRANGE LANDS

JUST then the wheel turned. Interest was awaking in England in American enterprises, and, fortunately for Keith, he had friends on that side.

Grinnell Rhodes now lived in England, dancing attendance on his wife, the daughter of Mr. Creamer of Creamer, Crustback & Company, who was aspiring to be in the fashionable set there.

Matheson, the former agent of the Wickershams, with whom Ferdy had quarrelled, had gone back to England, and had acquired a reputation as an expert.

By one of the fortuitous happenings so hard to account for, about this time Keith wrote to Rhodes, and Rhodes consulted Matheson, who knew the properties. Ferdy had incurred the Scotchman's implacable hate, and the latter was urged on now by a double motive. To Rhodes,

who was bored to death with the life he was leading, the story told by the Wickershams' old superintendent was like a trumpet to a war-horse.

Out of the correspondence with Rhodes grew a suggestion to Keith to come over and try to place the Rawson properties with an English syndicate. Keith had, moreover, a further reason for going. He had not recovered from the blow of Miss Brooke's refusal to let him visit Lois. He knew that in some way it was connected with his attention to Terpsichore; he knew that there was a misunderstanding, and felt that Wickersham was somehow connected with it. But he was too proud to make any further attempt to explain it.

Accordingly, armed with the necessary papers and powers, he arranged to go to England. He had control of and options on lands which were estimated to be worth several millions of dollars at any fair valuation.

Keith had long been trying to persuade his father to accompany him to New York on some of his visits; but the old gentleman had never been able to make up his mind to do so.

"I have grown too old to travel in strange lands," he said. "I tried to get there once, but

they stopped me just in sight of a stone fence on the farther slope beyond Gettysburg." A faint flash glittered in his quiet eyes. "I think I had better restrain my ambition now to migrations from the blue bed to the brown, and confine my travels to 'the realms of gold'!"

Now, after much urging, as Gordon was about to go abroad to try and place the Rawson properties there, the General consented to go to New York and see him off. It happened that Gordon was called to New York on business a day or two before his father was ready to go. So he exacted a promise that he would follow him, and went on ahead. Though General Keith would have liked to back out at the last moment, as he had given his word, he kept it. He wrote his son that he must not undertake to meet him, as he could not tell by what train he should arrive.

"I shall travel slowly," he said, "for I wish to call by and see one or two old friends on my way, whom I have not seen for years."

The fact was that he wished to see the child of his friend, General Huntington, and determined to avail himself of this opportunity to call by and visit her. Gordon's letter about her had opened a new vista in life.

The General found Brookford a pleasant village, lying on the eastern slope of the Piedmont, and having written to ask permission to call and pay his respects, he was graciously received by Miss Abby, and more than graciously received by her niece. Miss Lois would probably have met any visitor at the train; but she might not have had so palpitating a heart and so rich a color in meeting many a young man.

Few things captivate a person more than to be received with real cordiality by a friend immediately on alighting at a strange station from a train full of strangers. But when the traveller is an old and somewhat unsophisticated man, and when the friend is a young and very pretty girl, and when, after a single look, she throws her arms around his neck and kisses him, the capture is likely to be as complete as any that could take place in life. When Lois Huntington, after asking about his baggage, and exclaiming because he had sent his trunk on to New York and had brought only a valise, as if he were only stopping off between trains, finally settled herself down beside the General and took the reins of the little vehicle that she had come in, there was, perhaps, not a more pleased old

gentleman in the world than the one who sat beside her.

"How you have grown!" he said, gazing at her with admiration. "Somehow, I always thought of you as a little girl—a very pretty little girl."

She thought of what his son had said at their meeting at the ball.

"But you know one must grow some, and it has been eleven years since then. Think how long that has been!"

"Eleven years! Does that appear so long to you?" said the old man, smiling. "So it is in our youth. Gordon wrote me of his meeting you and of how you had changed."

I wonder what he meant by that, said Lois to herself, the color mounting to her cheek. "He thought I had changed, did he?" she asked tentatively, after a moment, a trace of grimness stealing into her face, where it lay like a little cloud in May.

"Yes; he hardly knew you. You see, he did not have the greeting that I got."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Lois. "If he had, I don't know what he might have thought!" She grew as grave as she could.

"He said you were the sweetest and prettiest

girl there, and that all the beauty of New York was there, even the beautiful Mrs.—what is her name? She was Miss Yorke."

Lois's face relaxed suddenly with an effect of sunshine breaking through a cloud.

"Did he say that?" she exclaimed.

"He did, and more. He is a young man of some discernment," observed the old fellow, with a chuckle of gratification.

"Oh, but he was only blinding you. He is in love with Mrs. Lancaster."

"Not he."

But Lois protested guilefully that he was.

A little later she asked the General:

"Did you ever hear of any one in New Leeds who was named Terpsichore?"

"Terpsichore? Of course. Every one knows her there. I never saw her until she became a nurse, when she was nursing my son. She saved his life, you know?"

"Saved his life!" Her face had grown almost grim. "No, I never heard of it. Tell me about it."

"Saved his life twice, indeed," said the old General. "She has had a sad past, but she is a noble woman." And unheeding Lois's little sniff, he told the whole story of Terpsichore,

and the brave part she had played. Spurred on by his feeling, he told it well, no less than did he the part that Keith had played. When he was through, there had been tears in Lois's eyes, and her bosom was still heaving.

"Thank you," she said simply, and the rest of the drive was in silence.

When General Keith left Brookford he was almost as much in love with his young hostess as his son could have been, and all the rest of his journey he was dreaming of what life might become if Gordon and she would but take a fancy to each other, and once more return to the old place. It would be like turning back the years and reversing the consequences of the war.

The General, on his arrival in New York, was full of his visit to Brookford and of Lois. "There is a girl after my own heart," he declared to Gordon, with enthusiasm. "Why don't you go down there and get that girl?"

Gordon put the question aside with a somewhat grim look. He was very busy, he said. His plans were just ripening, and he had no time to think about marrying. Besides, "a

green country girl'' was not the most promising wife. There were many other women who, etc., etc.

''Many other women!'' exclaimed the General. ''There may be; but I have not seen them lately. As to 'a green country girl'—why, they make the best wives in the world if you get the right kind. What do you want? One of these sophisticated, fashionable, strong-minded women—a woman's-rights woman? Heaven forbid! When a gentleman marries, he wants a lady and he wants a wife, a woman to love him; a lady to preside over his home, not over a woman's meeting.''

Gordon quite agreed with him as to the principle; but he did not know about the instance cited.

''Why, I thought you had more discernment,'' said the old gentleman. ''She is the sweetest creature I have seen in a long time. She has both sense and sensibility. If I were forty years younger, I should not be suggesting her to you, sir. I should be on my knees to her for myself.'' And the old fellow buttoned his coat, straightened his figure, and looked quite spirited and young.

At the club, where Gordon introduced him,

his father soon became quite a toast. Half the habitués of the "big room" came to know him, and he was nearly always surrounded by a group listening to his quaint observations of life, his stories of old times, his anecdotes, his quotations from Plutarch or from "Dr. Johnson, sir."

An evening or two after his appearance at the club, Norman Wentworth came in, and when the first greetings were over, General Keith inquired warmly after his wife.

"Pray present my compliments to her. I have never had the honor of meeting her, sir, but I have heard of her charms from my son, and I promise myself the pleasure of calling upon her as soon as I have called on your mother, which I am looking forward to doing this evening."

Norman's countenance changed a little at the unexpected words, for half a dozen men were around. When, however, he spoke it was in a very natural voice.

"Yes, my mother is expecting you," he said quietly. Mrs. Wentworth also would, he said, be very glad to see him. Her day was Thursday, but if General Keith thought of calling at any other time, and would be good enough to

let him know, he thought he could guarantee her being at home. He strolled away.

"By Jove! he did it well," said one of the General's other acquaintances when Norman was out of ear-shot.

"You know, he and his wife have quarrelled," explained Stirling to the astonished General.

"Great Heavens!" The old gentleman looked inexpressibly shocked.

"Yes—Wickersham."

"That scoundrel!"

"Yes; he is the devil with the women."

Next evening, as the General sat with Stirling among a group, sipping his toddy, some one approached behind him.

Stirling, who had become a great friend of the General's, greeted the newcomer.

"Hello, Ferdy! Come around; let me introduce you to General Keith, Gordon Keith's father."

The General, with a pleasant smile on his face, rose from his chair and turned to greet the newcomer. As he did so he faced Ferdy Wickersham, who bowed coldly. The old gentleman stiffened, put his hand behind his back, and with uplifted head looked him full in the eyes for a second, and then turned his back on him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Stirling, for declining to recognize any one whom you are good enough to wish to introduce to me, but that man I must decline to recognize. He is not a gentleman."

"I doubt if you know one," said Ferdy, with a shrug, as he strolled away with affected indifference. But a dozen men had seen the cut.

"I guess you are right enough about that, General," said one of them.

When the General reflected on what he had done, he was overwhelmed with remorse. He apologized profusely to Stirling for having committed such a solecism.

"I am nothing but an irascible old idiot, sir, and I hope you will excuse my constitutional weakness, but I really could not recognize that man."

Stirling's inveterate amiability soon set him at ease again.

"It is well for Wickersham to hear the truth now and then," he said. "I guess he hears it rarely enough. Most people feed him on lies."

Some others appeared to take the same view of the matter, for the General was more popular than ever.

Gordon found a new zest in showing his fa-

ther about the city. Everything astonished him. He saw the world with the eyes of a child. The streets, the crowds, the shop-windows, the shimmering stream of carriages that rolled up and down the avenue, the elevated railways which had just been constructed, all were a marvel to him.

"Where do these people get their wealth?" he asked.

"Some of them get it from rural gentlemen who visit the town," said Gordon, laughing.

The old fellow smiled. "I suspect a good many of them get it from us countrymen. In fact, at the last we furnish it all. It all comes out of the ground."

"It is a pity that we did not hold on to some of it," said Gordon.

The old gentleman glanced at him. "I do not want any of it. My son, Agar's standard was the best: 'neither poverty nor riches.' Riches cannot make a gentleman."

Keith laughed and called him old-fashioned, but he knew in his heart that he was right.

The beggars who accosted him on the street never turned away empty-handed. He had it not in his heart to refuse the outstretched hand of want.

"Why, that man who pretended that he had a large family and was out of work is a fraud," said Gordon. "I'll bet that he has no family and never works."

"Well, I didn't give him much," said the old man. "But remember what Lamb said: 'Shut not thy purse-strings always against painted distress. It is good to believe him. Give, and under the personate father of a family think, if thou pleasest, that thou hast relieved an indigent bachelor.' "

A week later Gordon was on his way to England and the General had returned home.

It was just after this that the final breach took place between Norman Wentworth and his wife. It was decided that for their children's sake there should be no open separation; at least, for the present. Norman had business which would take him away for a good part of the time, and the final separation could be left to the future. Meanwhile, to save appearances somewhat, it was arranged that Mrs. Wentworth should ask Lois Huntington to come up and spend the winter in New York, partly as her companion and partly as governess for the children. This might stop the mouths of some persons.

When the proposal first reached Miss Abigail, she rejected it without hesitation; she would not hear of it. Curiously enough, Lois suddenly appeared violently anxious to go. But following the suggestion came an invitation from Norman's mother asking Miss Abigail to pay her a long visit. She needed her, she said, and she asked as a favor that she would let Lois accept her daughter-in-law's invitation. So Miss Abby consented. "The Lawns" was shut up for the winter, and the two ladies went up to New York.

As Norman left for the West the very day that Lois was installed, she had no knowledge of the condition of affairs in that unhappy household, except what Gossip whispered about her. This would have been more than enough, but for the fact that the girl stiffened as soon as any one approached the subject, and froze even such veterans as Mrs. Nailor.

Mrs. Wentworth was far too proud to refer to it. All Lois knew, therefore, was that there was trouble and she was there to help tide it over, and she meant, if she could, to make it up. Meanwhile, Mrs. Wentworth was very kind, if formal, to her, and the children, delighted to get rid of the former governess, whom they insisted

in describing as an "old cat," were her devoted slaves.

Yet Lois was not as contented as she had fondly expected to be.

She learned soon after her arrival that one object of her visit to New York would be futile. She would not see Mr. Keith. He had gone abroad.—"In pursuit of Mrs. Lancaster," said Mrs. Nailor; for Lois was willing enough to hear all that lady had to say on this subject, and it was a good deal. "You know, I believe she is going to marry him. She will unless she can get a title."

"I do not believe a title would make any difference to her," said Lois, rather sharply, glad to have any sound reason for attacking Mrs. Nailor.

"Oh, don't you believe it! She'd snap one up quick enough if she had the chance."

"She has had a plenty of chances," asserted Lois.

"Well, it may serve Mr. Keith a good turn. He looked very low down for a while last Spring —just after that big Creamer ball. But he had quite perked up this Fall, and, next thing I heard, he had gone over to England after Alice Lancaster, who is spending the winter there. It

was time she went, too, for people were beginning to talk a good deal of the way she ran after Norman Wentworth."

"I must go," said Lois, suddenly rising; "I have to take the children out."

"Poor dears!" sighed Mrs. Nailor. "I am glad they have some one to look after them." Lois's sudden change prevented any further condolence. Fortunately, Mrs. Nailor was too much delighted with the opportunity to pour her information into quite fresh ears to observe Lois's expression.

The story of the trouble between Mr. and Mrs. Wentworth was soon public property. Wickersham's plans appeared to him to be working out satisfactorily. Louise Wentworth must, he felt, care for him to sacrifice so much for him. In this assumption he let down the barriers of prudence which he had hitherto kept up, and, one evening when the opportunity offered, he openly declared himself. To his chagrin and amazement, she appeared to be shocked and even to resent it.

Yes, she liked him—liked him better than almost any one, she admitted; but she did not, she could not, love him. She was married.

Wickersham ridiculed the idea.

Married! Well, what difference did that make? Did not many married women love other men than their husbands? Had not her husband gone after another?

Her eyes closed suddenly; then her eyelids fluttered.

"Yes; but I am not like that. I have children." She spoke slowly.

"Nonsense," cried Wickersham. "Of course, we love each other and belong to each other. Send the children to your husband."

Mrs. Wentworth recoiled in horror. There was that in his manner and look which astounded her. "Abandon her children?" How could she? Her whole manner changed. "You have misunderstood me."

Wickersham grew angry.

"Don't be a fool, Louise. You have broken with your husband. Now, don't go and throw away happiness for a priest's figment. Get a divorce and marry me, if you want to; but at least accept my love."

But he had overshot the mark. He had opened her eyes. Was this the man she had taken as her closest friend!—for whom she had quarrelled with her husband and defied the world!

Wickersham watched her as her doubt worked

its way in her mind. He could see the process in her face. He suddenly seized her and drew her to him.

"Here, stop this! Your husband has abandoned you and gone after another woman."

She gave a gasp, but made no answer.

She pushed him away from her slowly, and after a moment rose and walked from the room as though dazed.

It was so unexpected that Wickersham made no attempt to stop her.

A moment later Lois entered the room. She walked straight up to him. Wickersham tried to greet her lightly, but she remained grave.

"Mr. Wickersham, I do not think you—ought to come here—as often as you do."

"And, pray, why not?" he demanded.

Her brown eyes looked straight into his and held them steadily.

"Because people talk about it."

"I cannot help people talking. You know what they are," said Wickersham, amused.

"You can prevent giving them occasion to talk. You are too good a friend of Cousin Louise to cause her unhappiness." The honesty of her words was undoubted. It spoke in

every tone of her voice and glance of her eyes. "She is most unhappy."

Wickersham conceived a new idea. How lovely she was in her soft blue dress!

"Very well; I will do what you say. There are few things I would not do for you." He stepped closer to her and gazed in her eyes. "Sit down. I want to talk to you."

"Thank you; I must go now."

Wickersham tried to detain her, but she backed away, her hands down and held a little back.

"Good-by."

"Miss Huntington—Lois—" he said; "one moment."

But she opened the door and passed out.

Wickersham walked down the street in a sort of maze.

CHAPTER XXIV

KEITH TRIES HIS FORTUNES IN ANOTHER LAND

IN fact, as usual, Mrs. Nailor's statement to Lois had some foundation, though very little. Mrs. Lancaster had gone abroad, and Keith had followed her.

Keith, on his arrival in England, found Rhodes somewhat changed, at least in person. Years of high living and ease had rounded him, and he had lost something of his old spirit. At times an expression of weariness or discontent came into his eyes.

He was as cordial as ever to Keith, and when Keith unfolded his plans he entered into them with earnestness.

"You have come at a good time," he said. "They are beginning to think that America is all a bonanza."

After talking over the matter, Rhodes invited Keith down to the country.

"We have taken an old place in Warwick-

shire for the hunting. An old friend of yours is down there for a few days,"—his eyes twinkled,—"and we have some good fellows there. Think you will like them—some of them," he added.

"Who is my friend?" asked Keith.

"Her name was Alice Yorke," he replied, with his eyes on Keith's face.

At the name another face sprang to Keith's mind. The eyes were brown, not blue, and the face was the fresh face of a young girl. Yet Keith accepted.

Rhodes did not tell him that Mrs. Lancaster had not accepted their invitation until after she had heard that he was to be invited. Nor did he tell him that she had authorized him to subscribe largely to the stock of the new syndicate.

On reaching the station they were met by a rich equipage with two liveried servants, and, after a short drive through beautiful country, they turned into a fine park, and presently drove up before an imposing old country house; for "The Keep" was one of the finest mansions in all that region. It was also one of the most expensive. It had broken its owners to run it. But this was nothing to Creamer of Creamer, Crustback & Company; at least, it was nothing

to Mrs. Creamer, or to Mrs. Rhodes, who was her daughter. She had plans, and money was nothing to her. Rhodes was manifestly pleased at Keith's exclamations of appreciation as they drove through the park with its magnificent trees, its coppices and coverts, its stretches of emerald sward and roll of gracious hills, and drew up at the portal of the mansion. Yet he was inclined to be a little apologetic about it, too.

"This is rather too rich for me," he said, between a smile and a sigh. "Somehow, I began too late."

It was a noble old hall into which he ushered Keith, the wainscoting dark with age, and hung with trophies of many a chase and forgotten field. A number of modern easy-chairs and great rich rugs gave it an air of comfort, even if they were not altogether harmonious.

Keith did not see Mrs. Rhodes till the company were all assembled in the drawing-room for dinner. She was a rather pretty woman, distinctly American in face and voice, but in speech more English than any one Keith had seen since landing. Her hair and speech were arranged in the extreme London fashion. She was "awfully keen on" everything she fancied,

and found most things English "ripping." She greeted Keith with somewhat more formality than he had expected from Grinnell Rhodes's wife, and introduced him to Colonel Campbell, a handsome, broad-shouldered man, as "an American," which Keith thought rather unnecessary, since no one could have been in doubt about it.

Keith found, on his arrival in the drawing-room, that the house was full of company, a sort of house-party assembled for the hunting.

Suddenly there was a stir, followed by a hush in the conversation, and monocles and lorgnons went up.

"Here she comes," said a man near Keith.

"Who is she?" asked a thin woman with ugly hands, dropping her monocle with the air of a man.

"La Belle Américaine," replied the man beside her, "a friend of the host."

"Oh! Not of the hostess?"

"Oh, I don't know. I met her last night—"

"Steepleton is ahead—wins in a walk."

"Oh, she's rich? The castle needs a new roof? Will it be in time for next season?"

The gentleman said he knew nothing about it.

Keith turned and faced Alice Lancaster.

She was dressed in a black gown that fitted perfectly her straight, supple figure, the soft folds clinging close enough to show the gracious curves, and falling away behind her in a train that, as she stood with her head uplifted, gave her an appearance almost of majesty. Her round arms and perfect shoulders were of dazzling whiteness; her abundant brown hair was coiled low on her snowy neck, showing the beauty of her head; and her single ornament was one rich red rose fastened in her bodice with a small diamond clasp. It was the little pin that Keith had found in the Ridgely woods and returned to her so long ago; though Keith did not recognize it. It was the only jewel about her, and was worn simply to hold the rose, as though that were the thing she valued. Keith's thoughts sprang to the first time he ever saw her with a red rose near her heart—the rose he had given her, which the humming-bird had sought as its chalice.

The other ladies were all gowned in satin and velvet of rich colors, and were flaming in jewels, and as Mrs. Lancaster stood among them and they fell back a little on either side to look at her, they appeared, as it were, a setting for her.

After the others were presented, Keith stepped forward to greet her, and her face lit up with a light that made it suddenly young.

"I am so glad to see you." She clasped his hand warmly. "It is so good to see an old friend from our ain countree."

"I do not need to say I am glad to see you," said Keith, looking her in the eyes. "You are my ain countree here."

At that moment the rose fell at her feet. It had slipped somehow from the clasp that held it. A half-dozen men sprang forward to pick it up, but Keith was ahead of them. He took it up, and, with his eyes looking straight into hers, handed it to her.

"It is your emblem; it is what I always think of you as being." The tone was too low for any one else to hear; but her mounting color and the light in her eyes told that she caught it.

Still looking straight into his eyes without a word, she stuck the rose in her bodice just over her heart.

Several women turned their gaze on Keith and scanned him with sudden interest, and one of them, addressing her companion, a broad-shouldered man with a pleasant, florid face, said in an undertone:

"That is the man you have to look out for, Steepleton."

"A good-looking fellow. Who is he?"

"Somebody, I fancy, or our hostess wouldn't have him here."

The dinner that evening was a function. Mrs. Rhodes would rather have suffered a serious misfortune than fail in any of the social refinements of her adopted land. Rhodes had suggested that Keith be placed next to Mrs. Lancaster, but Mrs. Rhodes had another plan in mind. She liked Alice Lancaster, and she was trying to do by her as she would have been done by. She wanted her to make a brilliant match. Lord Steepleton appeared designed by Providence for this especial purpose: the representative of an old and distinguished house, owner of a famous—indeed, of an historic—estate, unhappily encumbered, but not too heavily to be relieved by a providential fortune. Hunting was his most serious occupation. At present he was engaged in the most serious hunt of his career: he was hunting an heiress.

Mrs. Rhodes was his friend, and as his friend she had put him next to Mrs. Lancaster.

Ordinarily, Mrs. Lancaster would have been

extremely pleased to be placed next the lion of the occasion. But this evening she would have liked to be near another guest. He was on the other side of the board, and appeared to be, in the main, enjoying himself, though now and then his eyes strayed across in her direction, and presently, as he caught her glance, he lifted his glass and smiled. Her neighbor observed the act, and putting up his monocle, looked across the table; then glanced at Mrs. Lancaster, and then looked again at Keith more carefully.

"Who is your friend?" he asked.

Mrs. Lancaster smiled, with a pleasant light in her eyes.

"An old friend of mine, Mr. Keith."

"Ah! Fortunate man. Scotchman?"

"No; an American."

"Oh!— You have known him a long time?"

"Since I was a little girl."

"Oh!— What is he?"

"A gentleman."

"Yes." The Englishman took the trouble again to put up his monocle and take a fleeting glance across the table. "He looks it," he said. "I mean, what does he do? Is he a capitalist like—like our host? Or is he just getting to be a capitalist?"

"I hope he is," replied Mrs. Lancaster, with a twinkle in her eyes that showed she enjoyed the Englishman's mystification. "He is engaged in mining."

She gave a rosy picture of the wealth in the region from which Keith came.

"All your men do something, I believe?" said the gentleman.

"All who are worth anything," assented Mrs. Lancaster.

"No wonder you are a rich people."

Something about his use of the adjective touched her.

"Our people have a sense of duty, too, and as much courage as any others, only they do not make any to-do about it. I have a friend—a *gentleman*—who drove a stage-coach through the mountains for a while rather than do nothing, and who was held up one night and jumped from the stage on the robber, and chased him down the mountains and disarmed him."

"Good!" exclaimed the gentleman. "Nervy thing!"

"Rather," said Mrs. Lancaster, with mantling cheeks, stirred by what she considered a reflection on her people. "And that was not all he did. He had charge of a mine, and one day

the mine was flooded while the men were at work, and he went in in the darkness and brought the men out safe."

"Good!" said the gentleman. "But he had others with him? He did not go alone?"

"He started alone, and two men volunteered to go with him. But he sent them back with the first group they found, and then, as there were others, he waded on by himself to where the others were, and brought them out, bringing on his shoulder the man who had attempted his life."

"Fine!" exclaimed the gentleman. "I've been in some tight places myself; but I don't know about that. What was his name?"

"Keith."

"Oh!"

Her eyes barely glanced his way; but the Earl of Steepleton saw in them what he had never been able to bring there.

The Englishman put up his monocle and this time gazed long at Gordon.

"Nervy chap!" he said quietly. "Won't you present me after dinner?"

In his slow mind was dawning an idea that, perhaps, after all, this quiet American who had driven his way forward had found a baiting-

place which he, with all his titles and long pedigrees, could not enter. His honest, outspoken admiration had, however, done more to make him a place in that guarded fortress than all Mrs. Rhodes's praises had effected.

A little later the guests had all departed or scattered. Those who remained were playing cards and appeared settled for a good while.

"Keith, we are out of it. Let's have a game of billiards," said the host, who had given his seat to a guest who had just come in after saying good night on the stair to one of the ladies.

Keith followed him to the billiard-room, a big apartment finished in oak, with several large tables in it, and he and Rhodes began to play. The game, however, soon languished, for the two men had much to talk about.

"Houghton, you may go," said Rhodes to the servant who attended to the table. "I will ring for you when I want you to shut up."

"Thank you, sir"; and he was gone.

"Now tell me all about everything," said Rhodes. "I want to hear everything that has happened since I came away—came into exile. I know about the property and the town that has grown up just as I knew it would. Tell me

about the people—old Squire Rawson and Phrony, and Wickersham, and Norman and his wife."

Keith told him about them. "Rhodes," he said, as he ended, "you started it and you ought to have stayed with it. Old Rawson says you foretold it all."

Suddenly Rhodes flung his cue down on the table and straightened up. "Keith, this is killing me. Sometimes I think I can't stand it another day. I've a mind to chuck up the whole business and cut for it."

Keith gazed at him in amazement. The clouded brow, the burning eyes, the drawn mouth, all told how real that explosion was and from what depths it came. Keith was quite startled.

"It all seems to me so empty, so unreal, so puerile. I am bored to death with it. Do you think this is real?" He waved his arms impatiently about him. "It is all a sham and a fraud. I am nothing—nobody. I am a puppet on a hired stage, playing to amuse—not myself!—the Lord knows I am bored enough by it!—but a lot of people who don't care any more about me than I do about them. I can't stand this. D—n it! I don't want to make love to any other

man's wife any more than I will have any of them making love to my wife. I think they are beginning to understand that. I showed a little puppy the front door not long ago—an earl, too, or next thing to it, an earl's eldest son—for doing what he would no more have dared to do in an Englishman's house than he would have tried to burn it. After that, I think, they began to see I might be something. Keith, do you remember what old Rawson said to us once about marrying?"

Keith had been thinking of it all the evening.

"Keith, I was not born for this; I was born to *do* something. But for giving up I might have been like Stevenson or Eads or your man Maury, whom they are all belittling because he did it all himself instead of getting others to do it. By George! I hope to live till I build one more big bridge or run one more long tunnel. Jove! to stand once more up on the big girders, so high that the trees look small below you, and see the bridge growing under your eyes where the old croakers had said nothing would stand!"

Keith's eyes sparkled, and he reached out his hand; and the other grasped it.

When Keith returned home, he was already in sight of victory.

The money had all been subscribed. His own interest in the venture was enough to make him rich, and he was to be general superintendent of the new company, with Matheson as his manager of the mines. All that was needed now was to complete the details of the transfer of the properties, perfect his organization, and set to work. This for a time required his presence more or less continuously in New York, and he opened an office in one of the office buildings down in the city, and took an apartment in a pleasant up-town hotel.

When Keith returned to New York that Autumn, it was no longer as a young man with eyes aflame with hope and expectation and face alight with enthusiasm. The eager recruit had changed to the veteran. He had had experience of a world where men lived and died for the most sordid of all rewards—money, mere money.

The fight had left its mark upon him. The mouth had lost something of the smile that once lurked about its corners, but had gained in strength. The eyes, always direct and steady, had more depth. The shoulders had a squarer set, as though they had been braced

against adversity. Experience of life had sobered him.

Sometimes it had come to him that he might be caught by the current and might drift into the same spirit, but self-examination up to this time had reassured him. He knew that he had other motives: the trust reposed in him by his friends, the responsibility laid upon him, the resolve to justify that confidence, were still there, beside his eager desire for success.

He called immediately to see Norman. He was surprised to find how much he had aged in this short time. His hair was sprinkled with gray. He had lost all his lightness. He was distrait and almost morose.

"You men here work too hard," asserted Keith. "You ought to have run over to England with me. You'd have learned that men can work and live too. I spent some of the most profitable time I was over there in a deer forest, which may have been Burnam-wood, as all the trees had disappeared—gone somewhere, if not to Dunsinane."

Norman half smiled, but he answered wearily:

"I wish I had been anywhere else than where I was."

He turned away while he was speaking and

fumbled among the papers on his desk. Keith rose, and Norman rose also.

"I will send you cards to the clubs. I shall not be in town to-night, but to-morrow night, or the evening after, suppose you dine with me at the University. I'll have two or three fellows to meet you—or, perhaps, we'll dine alone. What do you say? We can talk more freely."

Keith said that this was just what he should prefer, and Norman gave him a warm handshake and, suddenly seating himself at his desk, dived quickly into his papers.

Keith came out mystified. There was something he could not understand. He wondered if the trouble of which he had heard had grown.

Next morning, looking over the financial page of a paper, Keith came on a paragraph in which Norman's name appeared. He was mentioned as one of the directors of a company which the paper declared was among those that had disappointed the expectations of investors. There was nothing very tangible about the article; but the general tone was critical, and to Keith's eye unfriendly.

When, the next afternoon, Keith rang the door-bell at Norman's house, and asked if Mrs.

Wentworth was at home, the servant who opened the door informed him that no one of that name lived there. They used to live there, but had moved. Mrs. Wentworth lived somewhere on Fifth Avenue near the Park. It was a large new house near such a street, right-hand side, second house from the corner.

Keith had a feeling of disappointment. Somehow, he had hoped to hear something of Lois Huntington.

Keith, having resolved to devote the afternoon to the call on his friend's wife, and partly in the hope of learning where Lois was, kept on, and presently found himself in front of a new double house, one of the largest on the block. Keith felt reassured.

"Well, this does not look as if Wentworth were altogether broke," he thought.

A strange servant opened the door. Mrs. Wentworth was not at home. The other lady was in—would the gentleman come in? There was the flutter of a dress at the top of the stair.

Keith said no. He would call again. The servant looked puzzled, for the lady at the top of the stair had seen Mr. Keith cross the street and had just given orders that he should be admitted, as she would see him. Now, as Keith

walked away, Miss Lois Huntington descended the stair.

"Why didn't you let him in, Hucless?" she demanded.

"I told him you were in, Miss; but he said he would not come in."

Miss Huntington turned and walked slowly back up to her room. Her face was very grave; she was pondering deeply.

A little later Lois Huntington put on her hat and went out.

Lois had not found her position at Mrs. Wentworth's the most agreeable in the world. Mrs. Wentworth was moody and capricious, and at times exacting.

She had little idea how often that quiet girl who took her complaints so calmly was tempted to break her vow of silence, answer her upbraidings, and return home. But her old friends were dropping away from her. And it was on this account and for Norman's sake that Lois put up with her capriciousness. She had promised Norman to stay with her, and she would do it.

Mrs. Norman's quarrel with Alice Lancaster was a sore trial to Lois. Many of her friends treated Lois as if she were a sort of upper servant, with a mingled condescension and hauteur.

Lois was rather amused at it, except when it became too apparent, and then she would show her little claws, which were sharp enough. But Mrs. Lancaster had always been sweet to her, and Lois had missed her sadly. She no longer came to Mrs. Wentworth's. Lois, however, was always urged to come and see her, and an intimacy had sprung up between the two. Lois, with her freshness, was like a breath of Spring to the society woman, who was a little jaded with her experience; and the elder lady, on her part, treated the young girl with a warmth that was half maternal, half the cordiality of an elder sister. What part Gordon Keith played in this friendship must be left to surmise.

It was to Mrs. Lancaster's that Lois now took her way. Her greeting was a cordial one, and Lois was soon confiding to her her trouble; how she had met an old friend after many years, and then how a contretemps had occurred. She told of his writing her, and of her failure to answer his letters, and how her aunt had refused to allow him to come to Brookford to see them.

Mrs. Lancaster listened with interest.

"My dear, there was nothing in that. Yes, that was just one of Ferdy's little lies," she said, in a sort of reverie.

"But it was so wicked in him to tell such false-

hoods about a man," exclaimed Lois, her color coming and going, her eyes flashing.

Mrs. Lancaster shrugged her shoulders.

"Ferdy does not like Mr. Keith, and he does like you, and he probably thought to prevent your liking him."

"I detest him."

The telltale color rushed up into her cheeks as Mrs. Lancaster's eyes rested on her, and as it mounted, those blue eyes grew a little more searching.

"I can scarcely bear to see him when he comes there," said Lois.

"Has he begun to go there again?" Mrs. Lancaster inquired, in some surprise.

"Yes; and he pretends that he is coming to see me!" said the girl, with a flash in her eyes. "You know that is not true?"

"Don't you believe him," said the other, gravely. Her eyes, as they rested on the girl's face, had a very soft light in them.

"Well, we must make it up," she said presently. "You are going to Mrs. Wickersham's?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes; Cousin Louise is going and says I must go. Mr. Wickersham will not be there, you know."

"Yes." She drifted off into a reverie.

CHAPTER XXV

THE DINNER AT MRS. WICKERSHAM'S

KEITH quickly discovered that Rumor was busy with Ferdy Wickersham's name in other places than gilded drawing-rooms. He had been dropped from the board of more than one big corporation in which he had once had a potent influence. Knowing men, like Stirling and his club friends, began to say that they did not see how he had kept up. But up-town he still held on—held on with a steady eye and stony face that showed a nerve worthy of a better man. His smile became more constant,—to be sure, it was belied by his eyes: that cold gleam was not mirth,—but his voice was as insolent as ever.

Several other rumors soon began to float about. One was that he and Mrs. Wentworth had fallen out. As to the cause of this the town was divided. One story was that the pretty governess at Mrs. Wentworth's was in some way concerned with it.

However this was, the Wickersham house was mortgaged, and Rumor began to say even uptown that the Wickersham fortune had melted away.

The news of Keith's success in England had reached home as soon as he had. His friends congratulated him, and his acquaintances greeted him with a warmth that, a few years before, would have cheered his heart and have made him their friend for life. Mrs. Nailor, when she met him, almost fell on his neck. She actually called him her "dear boy."

"Oh, I have been hearing about you!" she said archly. "You must come and dine with us at once and tell us all about it."

"About what?" inquired Keith.

"About your great successes on the other side. You see, your friends keep up with you!"

"They do, indeed, and sometimes get ahead of me," said Keith.

"How would to-morrow suit you? No, not to-morrow—Saturday? No; we are going out Saturday. Let me see—we are so crowded with engagements I shall have to go home and look at my book. But you must come very soon. You have heard the news, of course? Isn't it dreadful?"

"What news?" He knew perfectly what she meant.

"About the Norman Wentworth's getting a divorce? Dreadful, isn't it? Perfectly dreadful! But, of course, it was to be expected. Any one could see that all along?"

"I could not," said Keith, dryly; "but I do not claim to be any one."

"Which side are you on? Norman's, I suppose?"

"Neither," said Keith.

"You know, Ferdy always was in love with her?" This with a glance to obtain Keith's views.

"No; I know nothing about it."

"Yes; always," she nodded oracularly. "Of course, he is making love to Alice Lancaster, too, and to the new governess at the Wentworths'."

"Who is that?" asked Keith, moved by some sudden instinct to inquire.

"That pretty country cousin of Norman's, whom they brought there to save appearances when Norman first left. Huntington is her name."

Keith suddenly grew hot.

"Yes, Ferdy is making love to her, too. Why, they say that is what they have quarrelled

about. Louise is insanely jealous, and she is very pretty. Yes—you know, Ferdy is like some other men? Just gregarious? Yes? But Louise Wentworth was always his *grande passion.* He is just amusing himself with the governess, and she, poor little fool, supposes she has made a conquest. You know how it is?"

"I really know nothing about it," declared Keith, in a flame.

"Yes; and he was always her *grande passion?* Don't you think so?"

"No, I do not," said Keith, firmly. "I know nothing about it; but I believe she and Norman were devoted,—as devoted a couple as I ever saw,—and I do not see why people cannot let them alone. I think none too well of Ferdy Wickersham, but I don't believe a word against her. She may be silly; but she is a hundred times better than some who calumniate her."

"Oh, you dear boy! You were always so amiable. It's a pity the world is not like you; but it is not."

"It is a pity people do not let others alone and attend to their own affairs," remarked Keith, grimly. "I believe more than half the trouble is made by the meddlers who go around gossiping."

"Don't they! Why, every one is talking about it. I have not been in a drawing-room where it is not being discussed."

"I suppose not," said Mr. Keith.

"And, you know, they say Norman Wentworth has lost a lot of money, too. But, then, he has a large account to fall back on. Alice Lancaster has a plenty."

"What's that?" Keith's voice had an unpleasant sharpness in it.

"Oh, you know, he is her trustee, and they are great friends. Good-by. You must come and dine with us sometime—sometime soon, too."

And Mrs. Nailor floated away, and in the first drawing-room she visited told of Keith's return and of his taking the story of Louise Wentworth and Ferdy Wickersham very seriously; adding, "And you know, I think he is a great admirer of Louise himself—a very great admirer. Of course, he would like to marry Alice Lancaster, just as Ferdy would. They all want to marry her; but Louise Wentworth is the one that has their hearts. She knows how to capture them. You keep your eyes open. You ought to have seen the way he looked when I mentioned Ferdy Wickersham and her. My dear, a man doesn't look that way unless he feels something here."

She tapped solemnly the spot where she imagined her heart to be, that dry and desiccated organ that had long ceased to know any real warmth.

A little time afterwards, Keith, to his great surprise, received an invitation to dine at Mrs. Wickersham's. He had never before received an invitation to her house, and when he had met her, she had always been stiff and repellent toward him. This he had regarded as perfectly natural; for he and Ferdy had never been friendly, and of late had not even kept up appearances.

He wondered why he should be invited now. Could it be true, as Stirling had said, laughing, that now he had the key and would find all doors open to him?

Keith had not yet written his reply when he called that evening at Mrs. Lancaster's. She asked him if he had received such an invitation. Keith said yes, but he did not intend to go. He almost thought it must have been sent by mistake.

"Oh, no; now come. Ferdy won't be there, and Mrs. Wickersham wants to be friendly with you. You and Ferdy don't get along; but neither do she and Ferdy. You know they have

fallen out? Poor old thing! She was talking about it the other day, and she burst out crying. She said he had been her idol."

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, Ferdy's selfishness."

"He is a brute! Think of a man quarrelling with his mother! Why —!" He went into a reverie in which his face grew very soft, while Mrs. Lancaster watched him silently. Presently he started. "I have nothing against her except a sort of general animosity from boyhood, which I am sorry to have."

"Oh, well, then, come. As people grow older they outgrow their animosities and wish to make friends."

"You being so old as to have experienced it?" said Keith.

"I am nearly thirty years old," she said. "Isn't it dreadful?"

"Aurora is much older than that," said Keith.

"Ah, Sir Flatterer, I have a mirror." But her eyes filled with a pleasant light as Keith said:

"Then it will corroborate what needs no proof."

She knew it was flattery, but she enjoyed it and dimpled.

"Now, you will come? I want you to come." She looked at him with a soft glow in her face.

"Yes. On your invitation."

"Alice Lancaster, place one good deed to thy account: 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' " said Mrs. Lancaster.

When Keith arrived at Mrs. Wickersham's he found the company assembled in her great drawing-room—the usual sort to be found in great drawing-rooms of large new chateau-like mansions in a great and commercial city.

"Mr. Keats!" called out the prim servant. They always took this poetical view of his name.

Mrs. Wickersham greeted him civilly and solemnly. She had aged much since Keith saw her last, and had also grown quite deaf. Her face showed traces of the desperate struggle she was making to keep up appearances. It was apparent that she had not the least idea who he was; but she shook hands with him much as she might have done at a funeral had he called to pay his respects. Among the late arrivals was Mrs. Wentworth. She was the richest-dressed woman in the room, and her jewels were the fin-

est, but she had an expression on her face, as she entered, which Keith had never seen there. Her head was high, and there was an air of defiance about her which challenged the eye at once.

"I don't think I shall speak to her," said a voice near Keith.

"Well, I have known her all my life, and until it becomes a public scandal I don't feel authorized to cut her—"

The speaker was Mrs. Nailor, who was in her most charitable mood.

"Oh, of course, I shall speak to her here, but I mean—I certainly shall not visit her."

"You know she has quarrelled with her friend, Mrs. Lancaster? About her husband." This was behind her fan.

"Oh, yes. She is to be here to-night. Quite brazen, is n't it? We shall see how they meet. I met a remarkably pretty girl down in the dressing-room," she continued; "one of the guests. She has such pretty manners, too. Really, I thought, from her politeness to me in arranging my dress, she must be one of the maids until Mrs. Wentworth spoke to her. Young girls nowadays are so rude! They take up the mirror the whole time, and never think

of letting you see yourself. I wonder who she can be?"

"Possibly Mrs. Wentworth's companion. I think she is here. She has to have some one to do the proprieties, you know?" said Mrs. Nailor.

"I should think it might be as well," assented the other, with a sniff. "But she would hardly be here!"

"She is really her governess, a very ill-bred and rude young person," said Mrs. Nailor.

The other sighed.

"Society is getting so democratic now, one might say, so mixed, that there is no telling whom one may meet nowadays."

"No, indeed," pursued Mrs. Nailor. "I do not at all approve of governesses and such persons being invited out. I think the English way much the better. There the governess never dreams of coming to the table except to luncheon, and her friends are the housekeeper and the butler."

Keith, wearied of the banalities at his ear, crossed over to where Mrs. Wentworth stood a little apart from the other ladies. One or two men were talking to her. She was evidently pleased to see him. She talked volubly, and

with just that pitch in her voice that betrays a subcurrent of excitement.

From time to time she glanced about her, appearing to Keith to search the faces of the other women. Keith wondered if it were a fancy of his that they were holding a little aloof from her. Presently Mrs. Nailor came up and spoke to her.

Keith backed away a little, and found himself mixed up with the train of a lady behind him, a dainty thing of white muslin.

He apologized in some confusion, and turning, found himself looking into Lois Huntington's eyes. For a bare moment he was in a sort of maze. Then the expression in her face dispelled it. She held out her hand, and he clasped it; and before he had withdrawn his eyes from hers, he knew that his peace was made, and Mrs. Wickersham's drawing-room had become another place. This, then, was what Alice Lancaster meant when she spoke of the peacemakers.

"It does not in the least matter about the dress, I assure you," she said in reply to his apology. "My dressmaker, Lois Huntington, can repair it so that you will not know it has been torn. It was only a ruse of mine to attract your attention." She was trying to speak

lightly. "I thought you were not going to speak to me at all. It seems to be a way you have of treating your old friends—your oldest friends," she laughed.

"Oh, the insolence of youth!" said Keith, wishing to keep away from a serious subject. "Let us settle this question of age here and now. I say you are seven years old."

"You are a Bourbon," she said; "you neither forget nor learn. Look at me. How old do I look?"

"Seven—"

"No. Look."

"I am looking—would I were Argus! You look like—perpetual Youth."

And she did. She was dressed in pure white. Her dark eyes were soft and gentle, yet with mischief lurking in them, and her straight brows, almost black, added to their lustre. Her dark hair was brushed back from her white forehead, and as she turned, Keith noted again, as he had done the first time he met her, the fine profile and the beautiful lines of her round throat, with the curves below it, as white as snow. "Perpetual Youth," he murmured.

"And do you know what you are?" she challenged him.

"Yes; Age."

"No. Flattery. But I am proof. I have learned that men are deceivers ever. You positively refused to see me when I had left word with the servant that I would see you if you called." She gave him a swift little glance to see how he took her charge.

"I did nothing of the kind. I will admit that I should know where you are by instinct, as Sir John knew the Prince; but I did not expect you to insist on my doing so. How was I to know you were in the city?"

"The servant told you."

"The servant told me?"

As Keith's brow puckered in the effort to unravel the mystery, she nodded.

"Um-hum—I heard him. I was at the head of the stair."

Keith tapped his head.

"It's old age—sheer senility."

" 'No; I don't want to see the other lady,' " she said, mimicking him so exactly that he opened his eyes wide.

"I am staying at Mrs. Wentworth's—Cousin Norman's," she continued, with a little change of expression and the least little lift of her head.

Keith's expression, perhaps, changed slightly,

too, for she added quietly: "Cousin Louise had to have some one with her, and I am teaching the children. I am the governess."

"I have always said that children nowadays have all the best things," said Keith, desirous to get off delicate ground. "You know, some one has said he never ate a ripe peach in his life: when he was a boy the grown-ups had them, and since he grew up the children have them all."

She laughed.

"I am very severe, I assure you."

"You look it. I should think you might be Herod himself."

She smiled, and then the smile died out, and she glanced around her.

"I owe you an apology," she said in a lowered voice.

"For what?"

"For—mis—for not answering your letters. But I mis—I don't know how to say what I wish. Won't you accept it without an explanation?" She held out her hand and gave him the least little flitting glance of appeal.

"I will," said Keith. "With all my heart."

"Thank you. I have been very unhappy about it." She breathed a little sigh of relief, which Keith caught.

Mrs. Lancaster did not arrive until all the other guests had been there a little while. But when she entered she had never looked handsomer. As soon as she had greeted her hostess, her eyes swept around the room, and in their circuit rested for a moment on Keith, who was talking to Lois. She gave them a charming smile. The next moment, however, her eyes stole that way again, and this time they bore a graver expression. The admiration that filled the younger girl's eyes was unbounded and unfeigned.

"Don't you think she is the handsomest woman in the room?" she asked, with a nod toward Mrs. Lancaster.

Keith was suddenly conscious that he did not wish to commit himself to such praise. She was certainly very handsome, he admitted, but there were others who would pass muster, too, in a beauty show.

"Oh, but I know you must think so; every one says you do," Lois urged, with a swift glance up at him, which, somehow, Keith would have liked to avoid.

"Then, I suppose it must be so; for every one knows my innermost thoughts. But I think she was more beautiful when she was younger. I

do not know what it is; but there is something in Society that, after a few years, takes away the bloom of ingenuousness and puts in its place just the least little shade of unreality."

"I know what you mean; but she is so beautiful that one would never notice it. What a power such beauty is! I should be afraid of it." Lois was speaking almost to herself, and Keith, as she was deeply absorbed in observing Mrs. Lancaster, gazed at her with renewed interest.

"I'd so much rather be loved for myself," the girl went on earnestly. "I think it is one of the compensations that those who want such beauty have—"

"Well, it is one of the things which you must always hold merely as a conjecture, for you can never know by experience."

She glanced up at him with a smile, half pleased, half reproving.

"Do you think I am the sort that likes flattery? I believe you think we are all silly. I thought you were too good a friend of mine to attempt that line with me."

Keith declared that all women loved flattery, but protested, of course, that he was not flattering her.

"Why should I?" he laughed.

"Oh, just because you think it will please me, and because it is so easy. It is so much less trouble. It takes less intellect, and you don't think I am worth spending intellect on."

This Keith stoutly denied.

She gave him a fleeting glance out of her brown eyes. "She, however, is as good as she is handsome," she said, returning to Mrs. Lancaster.

"Yes; she is one of those who 'do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.' "

"There are not a great many like that around here," Lois smiled. "Here comes one now?" she added, as Mrs. Nailor moved up to them. She was "so glad" to see Miss Huntington out. "You must like your Winter in New York?" she said, smiling softly. "You have such opportunities for seeing interesting people—like Mr. Keith, here?" She turned her eyes on Keith.

"Oh, yes. I do. I see so many entertaining people," said Lois, innocently.

"They are very kind to you?" purred the elder lady.

"Most condescending." Lois turned her eyes toward Keith with a little sparkle in them; but as she read his appreciation a smile stole into them.

Dinner was solemnly announced, and the couples swept out in that stately manner appropriate to solemn occasions, such as marriages, funerals, and fashionable dinners.

"Do you know your place?" asked Keith of Lois, to whom he had been assigned.

"Don't I? A governess and not know her place! You must help me through."

"Through what?"

"The dinner. You do not understand what a tremendous responsibility you have. This is my first dinner."

"I always said dinners were a part of the curse," said Keith, lightly, smiling down at her fresh face with sheer content. "I shall confine myself hereafter to breakfast and lunch—except when I receive invitations to Mrs. Wickersham's," he added.

Mrs. Lancaster was on the other side of Keith; so he found the dinner much pleasanter than he had expected. She soon fell to talking of Lois, a subject which Keith found very agreeable.

"You know, she is staying with Louise Wentworth? Louise had to have some one to stay with her, so she got her to come and teach the children this Winter. Louise says she is trying to make something of her."

"From my slight observation, it seems to me as if the Creator has been rather successful in that direction already. How does she propose to help Him out?"

Mrs. Lancaster bent forward and took a good look at the girl, who at the moment was carrying on an animated conversation with Stirling. Her color was coming and going, her eyes were sparkling, and her cheek was dimpling with fun.

"She looks as if she came out of a country garden, doesn't she?" she said.

"Yes, because she has, and has not yet been wired to a stick."

Mrs. Lancaster's eyes grew graver at Keith's speech.

Just then the conversation became more general.

Some one told a story of a man travelling with his wife and meeting a former wife, and forgetting which one he then had.

"Oh, that reminds me of a story I heard the other day. It was awfully good—but just a little wicked," exclaimed Mrs. Nailor.

Keith's smile died out, and there was something very like a cloud lowering on his brow. Several others appeared surprised, and Mr.

Nailor, a small bald-headed man, said across the table: "Hally, don't you tell that story."

But Mrs. Nailor was not to be controlled.

"Oh, I must tell it! It is not going to hurt any of you. Let me see if there is any one here very young and innocent?" She glanced about the table. "Oh, yes; there is little Miss Huntington. Miss Huntington, you can stop your ears while I tell it."

"Thank you," said Lois, placidly. She leaned a little forward and put her fingers in her ears.

A sort of gasp went around the table, and then a shout of laughter, led by Stirling. Mrs. Nailor joined in it, but her face was red and her eyes were angry. Mrs. Wentworth looked annoyed.

"Good," said Mrs. Lancaster, in an undertone.

"Divine," said Keith, his eyes snapping with satisfaction.

"It was not so bad as that," said Mrs. Nailor, her face very red. "Miss Huntington, you can take your hands down now; I sha'n't tell it."

"Thank you," said Lois, and sat quietly back in her chair, with her face as placid as a child's.

Mrs. Nailor suddenly changed the conversation to Art. She was looking at a painting on the wall behind Keith, and after inspecting it

a moment through her lorgnon, turned toward the head of the table.

"Where did you get that picture, Mrs. Wickersham? Have I ever seen it before?"

The hostess's gaze followed hers.

"That? Oh, we have had it ever so long. It is a portrait of an ancestor of mine. It belonged to a relative, a distant relative—another branch, you know, in whose family it came down, though we had even more right to it, as we were an older branch," she said, gaining courage as she went on.

Mrs. Lancaster turned and inspected the picture.

"I, too, almost seem to have seen it before," she said presently, in a reflective way.

"My dear, you have not seen it before," declared the hostess, positively. "Although we have had it for a good while, it was at our place in the country. Brush, the picture-dealer, says it is one of the finest 'old masters' in New York, quite in the best style of Sir Peter— What's his name?"

"Then I have seen some one so like it—? Who can it be?" said Mrs. Lancaster, her mind still working along the lines of reminiscence.

Nearly every one was looking now.

"Why, I know who it is!" said Lois Hunting-

ton, who had turned to look at it, to Mrs. Lancaster. "It is Mr. Keith." Her clear voice was heard distinctly.

"Of course, it is," said Mrs. Lancaster. Others agreed with her.

Keith, too, had turned and looked over his shoulder at the picture behind him, and for a moment he seemed in a dream. His father was gazing down at him out of the frame. The next moment he came to himself. It was the man-in-armor that used to hang in the library at Elphinstone. As he turned back, he glanced at Mrs. Lancaster, and her eyes gazed into his. The next moment he addressed Mrs. Wickersham and started a new subject of conversation.

"That is it," said Mrs. Lancaster to herself. Then turning to her hostess, she said: "No, I never saw it before; I was mistaken."

But Lois knew that she herself had seen it before, and remembered where it was.

Mrs. Wickersham looked extremely uncomfortable, but Keith's calm courtesy set her at ease again.

When the gentlemen, after their cigars, followed the ladies into the drawing-room, Keith found Mrs. Lancaster and Lois sitting together, a little apart from the others, talking earnestly. He walked over and joined them.

They had been talking of the incident of the picture, but stopped as he came up.

"Now, Lois," said Mrs. Lancaster, gayly, "I have known Mr. Keith a long time, and I give you one standing piece of advice. Don't believe one word that he tells you; for he is the most insidious flatterer that lives."

"On the contrary," said Keith, bowing and speaking gravely to the younger girl, "I assure you that you may believe implicitly every word that I tell you. I promise you in the beginning that I shall never tell you anything but the truth as long as I live. It shall be my claim upon your friendship."

"Thank you," said Lois, lifting her eyes to his face. Her color had deepened a little at his earnest manner. "I love a palpable truth."

"You do not get it often in Society," said Mrs. Lancaster.

"I promise you that you shall always have it from me," said Keith.

"Thank you," she said again, quite earnestly, looking him calmly in the eyes. "Then we shall always be friends."

"Always."

Just then Stirling came up and with a very flattering speech asked Miss Huntington to sing.

"I hear you sing like a seraph," he declared.

"I thought they always cried," she said, smiling; then, with a half-frightened look across toward her cousin, she sobered and declared that she could not.

"I have been meaning to have her take lessons," said Mrs. Wentworth, condescendingly, from her seat near by; "but I have not had time to attend to it. She will sing very well when she takes lessons." She resumed her conversation. Stirling was still pressing Miss Huntington, and she was still excusing herself, declaring that she had no one to play her accompaniments.

"Please help me," she said in an undertone to Keith. "I used to play them myself, but Cousin Louise said I must not do that; that I must always stand up to sing."

"Nonsense," said Keith. "You sha'n't sing if you do not wish to do so; but let me tell you: there is a deed of record in my State conveying a tract of land to a girl from an old gentleman on the expressed consideration that she had sung 'Annie Laurie' for him when he asked her to do it, without being begged."

She looked at him as if she had not heard, and then glanced at her cousin.

"Either sing or don't sing, my dear," said

Mrs. Wentworth, with a slight frown. "You are keeping every one waiting."

Keith glanced over at her, and was about to say to Lois, "Don't sing"; but he was too late. Folding her hands before her, and without moving from where she stood near the wall, she began to sing "Annie Laurie." She had a lovely voice, and she sang as simply and unaffectedly as if she had been singing in her own room for her own pleasure.

When she got through, there was a round of applause throughout the company. Even Mrs. Wentworth joined in it; but she came over and said:

"That was well done; but next time, my dear, let some one play your accompaniment."

"Next time, don't you do any such thing," said Keith, stoutly. "You can never sing it so well again if you do. Please accept this from a man who would rather have heard you sing that song that way than have heard Albani sing in 'Lohengrin.'" He took the rose-bud out of his buttonhole and gave it to her, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Is this the truth?" she asked, with her gaze quite steady on his face.

"The palpable truth," he said.

CHAPTER XXVI

A MISUNDERSTANDING

MISS LOIS HUNTINGTON, as she sank back in the corner of her cousin's carriage, on their way home, was far away from the rattling New York street. Mrs. Wentworth's occasional recurrence to the unfortunate incidents of stopping her ears and of singing the song without an accompaniment did not ruffle her. She knew she had pleased one man—the one she at that moment would rather have pleased than all the rest of New York. Her heart was eased of a load that had made it heavy for many a day. They were once more friends. Mrs. Wentworth's chiding sounded as if it were far away on some alien shore, while Lois floated serenely on a tide that appeared to begin away back in her childhood, and was bearing her gently, still gently, she knew not whither. If she tried to look forward she was lost in a mist that hung like a soft haze over the horizon.

Might there be a haven yonder in that rosy distance? Or were those still the billows of the wide and trackless sea? She did not know or care. She would drift and meantime think of him, the old friend who had turned the evening for her into a real delight. Was he in love with Mrs. Lancaster? she wondered. Every one said he was, and it would not be unnatural if he were. It was on her account he had gone to Mrs. Wickersham's. She undoubtedly liked him. Many men were after her. If Mr. Keith was trying to marry her, as every one said, he must be in love with her. He would never marry any one whom he did not love. If he were in love with Mrs. Lancaster, would she marry him? Her belief was that she would.

At the thought she for one moment had a pang of envy.

Her reverie was broken in on by Mrs. Wentworth.

"Why are you so pensive? You have not said a word since we started."

"Why, I do not know. I was just thinking. You know, such a dinner is quite an episode with me."

"Did you have a pleasant time? Was Mr. Keith agreeable? I was glad to see you had

him; for he is a very agreeable man when he chooses, but quite moody, and you never know what he is going to say."

"I think that is one of his—of his charms—that you don't know what he is going to say. I get so tired of talking to people who say just what you know they are going to say—just what some one else has just said and what some one else will say to-morrow. It is like reading an advertisement."

"Lois, you must not be so unconventional," said Mrs. Wentworth. "I must beg you not to repeat such a thing as your performance this evening. I don't like it."

"Very well, Cousin Louise, I will not," said the girl, a little stiffly. "I shall recognize your wishes; but I must tell you that I do not agree with you. I hate conventionality. We all get machine-made. I see not the least objection to what I did, except your wishes, of course, and neither did Mr. Keith."

"Well, while you are with me, you must conform to my wishes. Mr. Keith is not responsible for you. Mr. Keith is like other men—ready to flatter a young and unsophisticated girl."

"No; Mr. Keith is not like other men. He does not have to wait and see what others think

and say before he forms an opinion. I am so tired of hearing people say what they think others think. Even Mr. Rimmon, at church, says what he thinks his congregation likes—just as when he meets them he flatters them and tells them what dear ladies they are, and how well they look, and how good their wine is. Why can't people think for themselves?''

''Well, on my word, Lois, you appear to be thinking for yourself! And you also appear to think very highly of Mr. Keith,'' said Mrs. Wentworth.

''I do. I have known Mr. Keith all my life,'' said the girl, gravely. ''He is associated in my mind with all that I loved.''

''There, I did not mean to call up sorrowful thoughts,'' said Mrs. Wentworth. ''I wanted you to have a good time.''

Next day Mr. Keith gave himself the pleasure of calling promptly at Mrs. Norman's. He remembered the time when he had waited a day or two before calling on Miss Huntington and had found her gone, with its train of misunderstandings. So he had no intention of repeating the error. In Love as in War, Success attends Celerity.

Miss Huntington was not at home, the servant

said in answer to Keith's inquiries for the ladies; she had taken the children out to see Madam Wentworth. But Mrs. Wentworth would see Mr. Keith.

Mrs. Wentworth was more than usually cordial. She was undoubtedly more nervous than she used to be. She soon spoke of Norman, and for a moment grew quite excited.

"I know what people say about me," she exclaimed. "I know they say I ought to have borne everything and have gone on smiling and pretending I was happy even when I had the proof that he was—was—that he no longer cared for me, or for my—my happiness. But I could not—I was not constituted so. And if I have refused to submit to it I had good reason."

"Mrs. Wentworth," said Keith, "will you please tell me what you are talking about?"

"You will hear about it soon enough," she said, with a bitter laugh. "All you have to do is to call on Mrs. Nailor or Mrs. Any-one-else for five minutes."

"If I hear what I understand you to believe, that Norman cares for some one else, I shall not believe it."

She laughed bitterly.

"Oh, you and Norman always swore by each

other. I guess that you are no better than other men."

"We are, at least, better than some other men," said Keith, "and Norman is better than most other men."

She simply shrugged her shoulders and drifted into a reverie. It was evidently not a pleasant one.

Keith rose to go. And a half-hour later he quite casually called at old Mrs. Wentworth's, where he found the children having a romp. Miss Huntington looked as sweet as a rose, and Keith thought, or at least hoped, she was pleased to see him.

Keith promptly availed himself of Mrs. Wentworth's permission, and was soon calling every day or two at her house, and even on those days when he did not call he found himself sauntering up the avenue or in the Park, watching for the slim, straight, trim little figure he now knew so well. He was not in love with Lois. He said this to himself quite positively. He only admired her, and had a feeling of protection and warm friendship for a young and fatherless girl who had once had every promise of a life of ease and joy, and was by the hap of ill fortune thrown out on the cold world and into a relation of de-

pendence. He had about given up any idea of falling in love. Love, such as he had once known it, was not for him. Love for love's sake —love that created a new world and peopled it with one woman—was over for him. At least, so he said.

And when he had reasoned thus, he would find himself hurrying along the avenue or in the Park, straining his eyes to see if he could distinguish her among the crowd of walkers and loungers that thronged the sidewalk or the foot-path a quarter of a mile away. And if he could not, he was conscious of disappointment; and if he did distinguish her, his heart would give a bound, and he would go racing along till he was at her side.

Oftenest, though, he visited her at Mrs. Went-worth's, where he could talk to her without the continual interruption of the children's busy tongues, and could get her to sing those old-fashioned songs that, somehow, sounded to him sweeter than all the music in the world.

In fact, he went there so often to visit her that he began to neglect his other friends. Even Norman he did not see as much of as formerly.

Once, when he was praising her voice to Mrs. Wentworth, she said to him: "Yes, I think she

would do well in concert. I am urging her to prepare herself for that; not at present, of course, for I need her just now with the children; but in a year or two the boys will go to school and the two girls will require a good French governess, or I may take them to France. Then I shall advise her to try concert. Of course, Miss Brooke cannot take care of her always. Besides, she is too independent to allow her to do it."

Keith was angry in a moment. He had never liked Mrs. Wentworth so little. "I shall advise her to do nothing of the kind," he said firmly. "Miss Huntington is a lady, and to have her patronized and treated as an inferior by a lot of *nouveaux riches* is more than I could stand."

"I see no chance of her marrying," said Mrs. Wentworth. "She has not a cent, and you know men don't marry penniless girls these days."

"Oh, they do if they fall in love. There are a great many men in the world and even in New York, besides the small tuft-hunting, money-loving parasites that one meets at the so-called swell houses. If those you and I know were all, New York would be a very insignificant place. The brains and the character and the heart; the makers and leaders, are not found at the dinners and balls we are honored with invitations

to by Mrs. Nailor and her like. Alice Lancaster was saying the other day—"

Mrs. Wentworth froze up.

"Alice Lancaster!" Her eyes flashed. "Do not quote her to me!" Her lips choked with the words.

"She is a friend of yours, and a good friend of yours," declared Keith, boldly.

"I do not want such friends as that," she said, flaming suddenly. "Who do you suppose has come between my husband and me?"

"Not Mrs. Lancaster."

"Yes."

"No," said Keith, firmly; "you wrong them both. You have been misled."

She rose and walked up and down the room in an excitement like that of an angry lioness.

"You are the only friend that would say that to me."

"Then I am a better friend than others." He went on to defend Mrs. Lancaster warmly.

When Keith left he wondered if that outburst meant that she still loved Norman.

It is not to be supposed that Mr. Keith's visits to the house of Mrs. Wentworth had gone unobserved or unchronicled. That portion of the set that knew Mrs. Wentworth best, which is

most given to the discussion of such important questions as who visits whom too often, and who has stopped visiting whom altogether, with the reasons therefor, was soon busy over Keith's visits.

They were referred to in the society column of a certain journal recently started, known by some as "The Scandal-monger's Own," and some kind friend was considerate enough to send Norman Wentworth a marked copy.

Some suggested timidly that they had heard that Mr. Keith's visits were due to his opinion of the governess; but they were immediately suppressed.

Mrs. Nailor expressed the more general opinion when she declared that even a débutante would know that men like Ferdy Wickersham and Mr. Keith did not fall in love with unknown governesses. That sort of thing would do to put in books; but it did not happen in real life. They might visit them, but—! After which she proceeded to say as many ill-natured things about Miss Lois as she could think of; for the story of Lois's stopping her ears had also gotten abroad.

Meantime, Keith pursued his way, happily ignorant of the motives attributed to him by

some of those who smiled on him and invited him to their teas. A half-hour with Lois Huntington was reward enough to him for much waiting. To see her eyes brighten and to hear her voice grow softer and more musical as she spoke his name; to feel that she was in sympathy with him, that she understood him without explanation, that she was interested in his work: these were the rewards which lit up life for him and sent him to his rooms cheered and refreshed. He knew that she had no idea of taking him otherwise than as a friend. She looked on him almost as a contemporary of her father. But life was growing very sweet for him again.

It was not long before the truth was presented to him.

One of his club friends rallied him on his frequent visits in a certain quarter and the conquest which they portended. Keith flushed warmly. He had that moment been thinking of Lois Huntington. He had just been to see her, and her voice was still in his ears; so, though he thought it unusual in Tom Trimmer to refer to the matter, it was not unnatural. He attempted to turn the subject lightly by pretending to misunderstand him.

"I mean, I hear you have cut Wickersham

out. Ferdy thought he had a little corner there."

Again Keith reddened. He, too, had sometimes thought that Ferdy was beginning to be attentive to Lois Huntington. Others manifestly thought so too.

"I don't know that I understand you," he said.

"Don't you?" laughed the other. "Haven't you seen the papers lately?"

Keith chilled instantly.

"Norman Wentworth is my friend," he said quietly.

"So they say is Mrs. Norm—" began Mr. Trimmer, with a laugh.

Before he had quite pronounced the name, Keith leaned forward, his eyes levelled right into the other's.

"Don't say that, Trimmer. I want to be friends with you," he said earnestly. "Don't you ever couple my name with that lady's. Her husband is my friend, and any man that says I am paying her any attention other than such as her husband would have me pay her says what is false."

"I know nothing about that," said Tom, half surlily. "I am only giving what others say."

"Well, don't you even do that." He rose to his feet, and stood very straight. "Do me the favor to say to any one you may hear intimate such a lie that I will hold any man responsible who says it."

"Jove!" said Mr. Trimmer, afterwards, to his friend Minturn, "must be some fire there. He was as hot as pepper in a minute. Wanted to fight any one who mentioned the matter. He'll have his hands full if he fights all who are talking about him and Ferdy's old flame. I heard half a roomful buzzing about it at Mrs. Nailor's. But it was none of my affair. If he wants to fight about another man's wife, let him. It's not the best way to stop the scandal."

"You know, I think Ferdy is a little relieved to get out of that," added Mr. Minturn. "Ferdy wants money, and big money. He can't expect to get money there. They say the chief cause of the trouble was Wentworth would not put up money enough for her. He has got his eye on the Lancaster-Yorke combine, and he is all devotion to the widow now."

"She won't look at him. She has too much sense. Besides, she likes Keith," said Stirling.

As Mr. Trimmer and his friend said, if Keith expected to silence all the tongues that were

clacking with his name and affairs, he was likely to be disappointed. There are some people to whose minds the distribution of scandal is as great a delight as the sweetest morsel is to the tongue. Besides, there was one person who had a reason for spreading the report. Ferdy Wickersham had returned and was doing his best to give it circulation.

Norman Wentworth received in his mail, one morning, a thin letter over which a frown clouded his brow. The address was in a backhand. He had received a letter in the same handwriting not long previously—an anonymous letter. It related to his wife and to one whom he had held in high esteem. He had torn it up furiously in little bits, and had dashed them into the waste-basket as he had dashed the matter from his mind. He was near tearing this letter up without reading it; but after a moment he opened the envelope. A society notice in a paper the day before had contained the name of his wife and that of Mr. Gordon Keith, and this was not the only time he had seen the two names together. As his eye glanced over the single page of disguised writing, a deeper frown grew on his brow. It was only a few lines; but

it contained a barbed arrow that struck and rankled:

> "When the cat 's away
> The mice will play.
> If you have cut your wisdom-teeth,
> You 'll know your mouse. His name is ——"

It was signed, "*A True Friend.*"

Norman crushed the paper in his hand, in a rage for having read it. But it was too late. He could not banish it from his mind: so many things tallied with it. He had heard that Keith was there a great deal. Why had he ceased speaking of it of late?

When Keith next met Norman there was a change in the latter. He was cold and almost morose; answered Keith absently, and after a little while rose and left him rather curtly.

When this had occurred once or twice Keith determined to see Norman and have a full explanation. Accordingly, one day he went to his office. Mr. Wentworth was out, but Keith said he would wait for him in his private office.

On the table lay a newspaper. Keith picked it up to glance over it. His eye fell on a marked passage. It was a notice of a dinner to which

he had been a few evenings before. Mrs. Wentworth's name was marked with a blue pencil, and a line or two below it was his own name similarly marked.

Keith felt the hot blood surge into his face, then a grip came about his throat. Could this be the cause? Could this be the reason for Norman's curtness? Could Norman have this opinion of him? After all these years!

He rose and walked from the office and out into the street. It was a blow such as he had not had in years. The friendship of a lifetime seemed to have toppled down in a moment.

Keith walked home in deep reflection. That Norman could treat him so was impossible except on one theory: that he believed the story which concerned him and Mrs. Wentworth. That he could believe such a story seemed absolutely impossible. He passed through every phase of regret, wounded pride, and anger. Then it came to him clearly enough that if Norman were laboring under any such hallucination it was his duty to dispel it. He should go to him and clear his mind. The next morning he went again to Norman's office. To his sorrow, he learned that he had left town the evening before for the West to see about some business matters. He would

be gone some days. Keith determined to see him as soon as he returned.

Keith had little difficulty in assigning the scandalous story to its true source, though he did Ferdy Wickersham an injustice in laying the whole blame on him.

Meantime, Keith determined that he would not go to Mrs. Wentworth's again until after he had seen Norman, even though it deprived him of the chance of seeing Lois. It was easier to him, as he was very busy now pushing through the final steps of his deal with the English syndicate. This he was the more zealous in as his last visit South had shown him that old Mr. Rawson was beginning to fail.

"I am just livin' now to hear about Phrony," said the old man, "—and to settle with that man," he added, his deep eyes burning under his shaggy brows.

Keith had little idea that the old man would ever live to hear of her again, and he had told him so as gently as he could.

"Then I shall kill him," said the old man, quietly.

Keith was in his office one morning when his attention was arrested by a heavy step outside his door. It had something familiar in it. Then

he heard his name spoken in a loud voice. Some one was asking for him, and the next moment the door opened and Squire Rawson stood on the threshold. He looked worn; but his face was serene. Keith's intuition told him why he had come; and the old man did not leave it in any doubt. His greeting was brief.

He had gotten to New York only that morning, and had already been to Wickersham's office; but the office was shut.

"I have come to find her," he said, "and I'll find her, or I'll drag him through this town by his neck." He took out a pistol and laid it by him on the table.

Keith was aghast. He knew the old man's resolution. His face showed that he was not to be moved from it. Keith began to argue with him. They did not do things that way in New York, he said. The police would arrest him. Or if he should shoot a man he would be tried, and it would go hard with him. He had better give up his pistol. "Let me keep it for you," he urged.

The old man took up the pistol and felt for his pocket.

"I'll find her or I'll kill him," he said stolidly. "I have come to do one or the other. If I do

that, I don't much keer what they do with me. But I reckon some of 'em would take the side of a woman what's been treated so. Well, I'll go on an' wait for him. How do you find this here place?'' He took out a piece of paper and, carefully adjusting his spectacles, read a number. It was the number of Wickersham's office.

Keith began to argue again; but the other's face was set like a rock. He simply put up his pistol carefully. ''I'll kill him if I don't find her. Well, I reckon somebody will show me the way. Good day.'' He went out.

The moment his footsteps had died away, Keith seized his hat and dashed out.

The bulky figure was going slowly down the street, and Keith saw him stop a man and show him his bit of paper. Keith crossed the street and hurried on ahead of him. Wickersham's office was only a few blocks away, and a minute later Keith rushed into the front office. The clerks looked up in surprise at his haste. Keith demanded of one of them if Mr. Wickersham was in. The clerk addressed turned and looked at another man nearer the door of the private office, who shook his head warningly. No, Mr. Wickersham was not in.

Keith, however, had seen the signal, and he

walked boldly up to the door of the private office.

"Mr. Wickersham is in, but he is engaged," said the man, rising hastily.

"I must see him immediately," said Keith, and opening the door, walked straight in.

Wickersham was sitting at his desk poring over a ledger, and at the sudden entrance he looked up, startled. When he saw who it was he sprang to his feet, his face changing slightly. Just then one of the clerks followed Keith.

As Keith, however, spoke quietly, Wickersham's expression changed, and the next second he had recovered his composure and with it his insolence.

"To what do I owe the honor of this unexpected visit?" he demanded, with a curl of his lip.

Keith gave a little wave of his arm, as if he would sweep away his insolence.

"I have come to warn you that old Adam Rawson is in town hunting you."

Wickersham's self-contained face paled suddenly, and he stepped a little back. Then his eye fell on the clerk, who stood just inside the door. "What do you want?" he demanded an-

grily. "—— you! can't you keep out when a gentleman wants to see me on private business?"

The clerk hastily withdrew.

"What does he want?" he asked of Keith, with a dry voice.

"He is hunting for you. He wants to find his granddaughter, and he is coming after you."

"What the —— do I know about his granddaughter!" cried Wickersham.

"That is for you to say. He swears that he will kill you unless you produce her. He is on his way here now, and I have hurried ahead to warn you."

Wickersham's face, already pale, grew as white as death, for he read conviction in Keith's tone. With an oath he turned to a bell and rang it.

"Ring for a cab for me at once," he said to the clerk who appeared. "Have it at my side entrance."

As Keith passed out he heard him say to the clerk:

"Tell any one who calls I have left town. I won't see a soul."

A little later an old man entered Wickersham & Company's office and demanded to see F. C. Wickersham.

There was a flurry among the men there, for they all knew that something unusual had occurred; and there was that about the massive, grim old man, with his fierce eyes, that demanded attention.

On learning that Wickersham was not in, he said he would wait for him and started to take a seat.

There was a whispered colloquy between two clerks, and then one of them told him that Mr. Wickersham was not in the city. He had been called away from town the day before, and would be gone for a month or two. Would the visitor leave his name?

"Tell him Adam Rawson has been to see him, and that he will come again." He paused a moment, then said slowly: "Tell him I'm huntin' for him and I'm goin' to stay here till I find him."

He walked slowly out, followed by the eyes of every man in the office.

The squire spent his time between watching for Wickersham and hunting for his granddaughter. He would roam about the streets and inquire for her of policemen and strangers, quite as if New York were a small village like Ridgely instead of a great hive in which hundreds of

thousands were swarming, their identity hardly known to any but themselves. Most of those to whom he applied treated him as a harmless old lunatic. But he was not always so fortunate. One night, when he was tired out with tramping the streets, he wandered into one of the parks and sat down on a bench, where he finally fell asleep. He was awakened by some one feeling in his pocket. He had just been dreaming that Phrony had found him and had sat down beside him and was fondling him, and when he first came back to consciousness her name was on his lips. He still thought it was she who sat beside him, and he called her by name, "Phrony." The girl, a poor, painted, bedizened creature, was quick enough to answer to the name.

"I am Phrony; go to sleep again."

The joy of getting back his lost one aroused the old man, and he sat up with an exclamation of delight. The next second, at sight of the strange, painted face, he recoiled.

"You Phrony?"

"Yes. Don't you know me?" She snuggled closer beside him, and worked quietly at his big watch, which somehow had caught in his tight vest pocket.

"No, you ain't! Who are you, girl? What are you doin'?"

The young woman put her arms around his neck, and began to talk cajolingly. He was "such a dear old fellow," etc., etc. But the old man's wit had now returned to him. His disappointment had angered him.

"Get away from me, woman. What are you doin' to me?" he demanded roughly.

She still clung to him, using her poor blandishments. But the squire was angry. He pushed her off. "Go away from me, I say. What do you want? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You don't know who I am. I am a deacon in the church, a trustee of Ridge College, and I have a granddaughter who is older than you. If you don't go away, I will tap you with my stick."

The girl, having secured his watch, with something between a curse and a laugh, went off, calling him "an old drunk fool."

Next moment the squire put his hand in his pocket to take out his watch, but it was gone. He felt in his other pockets, but they were empty, too. The young woman had clung to him long enough to rob him of everything. The

squire rose and hurried down the walk, calling lustily after her; but it was an officer who answered the call. When the squire told his story he simply laughed and told him he was drunk, and threatened, if he made any disturbance, to "run him in."

The old countryman flamed out.

"Run who in?" he demanded. "Do you know who I am, young man?"

"No, I don't, and I don't keer a ——."

"Well, I'm Squire Rawson of Ridgely, and I know more law than a hundred consarned blue-bellied thief-hiders like you. Whoever says I am drunk is a liar. But if I was drunk is that any reason for you to let a thief rob me? What is your name? I've a mind to arrest you and run you in myself. I've run many a better man in."

It happened that the officer's record was not quite clear enough to allow him to take the chance of a contest with so bold an antagonist as the squire of Ridgely. He did not know just who he was, or what he might be able to do. So he was willing to "break even," and he walked off threatening, but leaving the squire master of the field.

The next day the old man applied to Keith, who placed the matter in Dave Dennison's hands and persuaded the squire to return home.

Keith was very unhappy over the misunderstanding between Norman and himself. He wrote Norman a letter asking an interview as soon as he returned. But he received no reply. Then, having heard of his return, he went to his office one day to see him.

Yes, Mr. Wentworth was in. Some one was with him, but would Mr. Keith walk in? said the clerk, who knew of the friendship between the two. But Keith sent in his name.

The clerk came out with a surprised look on his face. Mr. Wentworth was "engaged."

Keith went home and wrote a letter, but his letter was returned unopened, and on it was the indorsement, "Mr. Norman Wentworth declines to hold any communication with Mr. Gordon Keith."

After this, Keith, growing angry, swore that he would take no further steps.

CHAPTER XXVII

PHRONY TRIPPER AND THE REV. MR. RIMMON

AS Keith stepped from his office one afternoon, he thought he heard his name called—called somewhat timidly. When, however, he turned and glanced around among the hurrying throng that filled the street, he saw no one whom he knew. Men and women were bustling along with that ceaseless haste that always struck him in New York—haste to go, haste to return, haste to hasten: the trade-mark of New York life: the hope of outstripping in the race.

A moment later he was conscious of a woman's step close behind him. He turned as the woman came up beside him, and faced—Phrony Tripper. She was so worn and bedraggled and aged that for a moment he did not recognize her. Then, as she spoke, he knew her.

"Why, Phrony!" He held out his hand. She seized it almost hungrily.

"Oh, Mr. Keith! Is it really you? I hardly

dared hope it was. I have not seen any one I knew for so long—so long!" Her face worked, and she began to whimper; but Keith soothed her.

He drew her away from the crowded thoroughfare into a side street.

"You knew—?" she said, and gazed at him with a silent appeal.

"Yes, I knew. He deceived you and deluded you into running away with him."

"I thought he loved me, and he did when he married me. I am sure he did. But when he met that lady—"

"When he did what?" asked Keith, who could scarcely believe his own ears. "Did he marry you? Ferdy Wickersham? Who married you? When? Where was it? Who was present?"

"Yes; I would not come until he promised—"

"Yes, I knew he would promise. But did he marry you afterwards? Who was present? Have you any witnesses?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. I was married here in New York—one night—about ten o'clock—the night we got here. Mr. Plume was our only witness. Mr. Plume had a paper the preacher gave him; but he lost it."

"He did! Who married you? Where was it?"

"His name was Rimm—Rimm-something—I cannot remember much; my memory is all gone. He was a young man. He married us in his room. Mr. Plume got him for me. He offered to marry us himself—said he was a preacher; but I wouldn't have him, and said I would go home or kill myself if they didn't have a preacher. Then Mr. Plume went and came back, and we all got in a carriage and drove a little way, and got out and went into a house, and after some talk we were married. I don't know the street. But I would know him if I saw him. He was a young, fat man, that smiled and stood on his toes." The picture brought up to Keith the fat and unctuous Rimmon.

"Well, then you went abroad, and your husband left you over there?"

"Yes; I was in heaven for—for a little while, and then he left me—for another woman. I am sure he cared for me, and he did not mean to treat me so; but she was rich and so beautiful, and—what was I?" She gave an expressive gesture of self-abnegation.

"Poor fool!" said Keith to himself. "Poor girl!" he said aloud.

"I have written; but, maybe, he never got my letter. He would not have let me suffer so."

Keith's mouth shut closer.

She went on to tell of Wickersham's leaving her; of her hopes that after her child was born he would come back to her. But the child was born and died. Then of her despair; of how she had spent everything, and sold everything she had to come home.

"I think if I could see him and tell him what I have been through, maybe he would—be different. I know he cared for me for a while.—But I can't find him," she went on hopelessly. "I don't want to go to him where there are others to see me, for I'm not fit to see even if they'd let me in—which they wouldn't. (She glanced down at her worn and shabby frock.) "I have watched for him 'most all day, but I haven't seen him, and the police ordered me away."

"I will find him for you," said Keith, grimly.

"Oh, no! You mustn't—you mustn't say anything to him. It would make him—it wouldn't do any good, and he'd never forgive me." She coughed deeply.

"Phrony, you must go home," said Keith.

For a second a spasm shot over her face; then

a ray of light seemed to flit across it, and then it died out.

She shook her head.

"No, I'll never go back there," she said.

"Oh, yes, you will—you must. I will take you back. The mountain air will restore you, and—" She was shaking her head, but the look in her eyes showed that she was thinking of something far off.

"No—no!"

"I will take you," repeated Keith. "Your grandfather will be—he will be all right. He has just been here hunting for you."

The expression on her face was so singular that Keith put his hand on her arm. To his horror, she burst into a laugh. It was so unreal that men passing glanced at her quickly, and, as they passed on, turned and looked back again.

"Well, good-by; I must find my husband," she said, holding out her hand nervously and speaking in a hurried manner. "He's got the baby with him. Tell 'em at home I'm right well, and the baby is exactly like grandmother, but prettier, of course." She laughed again as she turned away and started off hastily.

Keith caught up with her.

"But, Phrony—" But she hurried on, shak-

ing her head, and talking to herself about finding her baby and about its beauty. Keith kept up with her, put his hand in his pocket, and taking out several bills, handed them to her.

"Here, you must take this, and tell me where you are staying."

She took the money mechanically.

"Where am I? Oh!—where am I staying? Sixteen Himmelstrasse, third floor—yes, that's it. No:—18 Rue Petits Champs, troisième étage. Oh, no:—241 Hill Street. I'll show you the baby. I must get it now." And she sped away, coughing.

Keith, having watched her till she disappeared, walked on in deep reflection, hardly knowing what course to take. Presently his brow cleared. He turned and went rapidly back to the great office building where Wickersham had his offices on the first floor. He asked for Mr. Wickersham. A clerk came forward. Mr. Wickersham was not in town. No, he did not know when he would be back.

After a few more questions as to the possible time of his return, Keith left his card.

That evening Keith went to the address that Phrony had given him. It was a small lodging-house of, perhaps, the tenth rate. The dowdy

woman in charge remembered a young woman such as he described. She was ill and rather crazy and had left several weeks before. She had no idea where she had gone. She did not know her name. Sometimes she called herself "Miss Tripper," sometimes "Mrs. Wickersham."

Keith took a cab and drove to the detective agency where Dave Dennison had his office. Keith told him why he had come, and Dave listened with tightened lips and eyes in which the flame burned deeper and deeper.

"I'll find her," he said.

Having set Dennison to work, Keith next directed his steps toward the commodious house to which the Rev. William H. Rimmon had succeeded, along with the fashionable church and the fashionable congregation which his uncle had left.

He was almost sure, from the name she had mentioned, that Mr. Rimmon had performed the ceremony. Rimmon had from time to time connected his name with matrimonial affairs which reflected little credit on him.

From the time Mr. Rimmon had found his flattery and patience rewarded, the pulpit from which Dr. Little had for years delivered a well-

weighed, if a somewhat dry, spiritual pabulum had changed.

Mr. Rimmon knew his congregation too well to tax their patience with any such doctrinal sermons as his uncle had been given to. He treated his people instead to pleasant little discourses which were as much like Epictetus and Seneca as St. John or St. Paul.

Fifteen minutes was his limit,—eighteen at the outside,—weighed out like a ration. Doubtless, Mr. Rimmon had his own idea of doing good. His assistants worked hard in back streets and trod the dusty byways, succoring the small fry, while he stepped on velvet carpets and cast his net for the larger fish.

Was not Dives as well worth saving as Lazarus—and better worth it for Rimmon's purposes! And surely he was a more agreeable dinner-companion. Besides, nothing was really proved against Dives; and the crumbs from his table fed many a Lazarus.

But there were times when the Rev. William H. Rimmon had a vision of other things: when the Rev. Mr. Rimmon, with his plump cheeks and plump stomach, with his embroidered stoles and fine surplices, his rich cassocks and hand-worked slippers, had a vision of another life.

He remembered the brief period when, thrown with a number of earnest young men who had consecrated their lives to the work of their Divine Master, he had had aspirations for something essentially different from the life he now led. Sometimes, as he would meet some hard-working, threadbare brother toiling among the poor, who yet, for all his toil and narrowness of means, had in his face that light that comes only from feasting on the living bread, he envied him for a moment, and would gladly have exchanged for a brief time the "good things" that he had fallen heir to for that look of peace. These moments, however, were rare, and were generally those that followed some evening of even greater conviviality than usual, or some report that the stocks he had gotten Ferdy Wickersham to buy for him had unexpectedly gone down, so that he must make up his margins. When the margins had been made up and the stocks had reacted, Mr. Rimmon was sufficiently well satisfied with his own lot.

And of late Mr. Rimmon had determined to settle down. There were those who said that Mr. Rimmon's voice took on a peculiarly unctuous tone when a certain young widow, as noted for her wealth as for her good looks and good nature entered the portals of his church.

Keith now having rung the bell at Mr. Rimmon's pleasant rectory and asked if he was at home, the servant said he would see. It is astonishing how little servants in the city know of the movements of their employers. How much better they must know their characters!

A moment later the servant returned.

"Yes, Mr. Rimmon is in. He will be down directly; will the gentleman wait?"

Keith took his seat and inspected the books on the table—a number of magazines, a large work on Exegesis, several volumes of poetry, the Social Register, and a society journal that contained the gossip and scandal of the town.

Presently Mr. Rimmon was heard descending the stair. He had a light footfall, extraordinarily light in one so stout; for he had grown rounder with the years.

"Ah, Mr. Keith. I believe we have met before. What can I do for you?" He held Keith's card in his hand, and was not only civil, but almost cordial. But he did not ask Keith to sit down.

Keith said he had come to him hoping to obtain a little information which he was seeking for a friend. He was almost certain that Mr. Rimmon could give it to him.

"Oh, yes. Well? I shall be very glad, I am sure, if I can be of service to you. It is a part of our profession, you know. What is it?"

"Why," said Keith, "it is in regard to a marriage ceremony—a marriage that took place in this city three or four years ago, about the middle of November three years ago. I think you possibly performed the ceremony."

"Yes, yes. What are the names of the contracting parties? You see, I solemnize a good many marriage ceremonies. For some reason, a good many persons come to me. My church is rather—popular, you see. I hate to have 'fashionable' applied to holy things. I cannot tell without their names."

"Why, of course," said Keith, struck by the sudden assumption of a business manner. "The parties were Ferdinand C. Wickersham and a young girl, named Euphronia Tripper."

Keith was not consciously watching Mr. Rimmon, but the change in him was so remarkable that it astonished him. His round jaw actually dropped for a second. Keith knew instantly that he was the man. His inquiry had struck home. The next moment, however, Mr. Rimmon had recovered himself. A single glance shot out of his eyes, so keen and suspicious that

Keith was startled. Then his eyes half closed again, veiling their flash of hostility.

"'F. C. Wickershaw and Euphronia Trimmer?'" he repeated half aloud, shaking his head. "No, I don't remember any such names. No, I never united in the bonds of matrimony any persons of those names. I am quite positive." He spoke decisively.

"No, not Wicker*shaw*—F. C. Wicker*sham* and Euphronia Tripper. Ferdy Wickersham—you know him. And the girl was named Tripper; she might have called herself 'Phrony' Tripper."

"My dear sir, I cannot undertake to remember the names of all the persons whom I happen to come in contact with in the performance of my sacred functions," began Mr. Rimmon. His voice had changed, and a certain querulousness had crept into it.

"No, I know that," said Keith, calmly; "but you must at least remember whether within four years you performed a marriage ceremony for a man whom you know as well as you know Ferdy Wickersham—?"

"Ferdy Wickersham! Why don't you go and ask him?" demanded the other, suddenly. "You appear to know him quite as well as I, and cer-

tainly Mr. Wickersham knows quite as well as I whether or not he is married. I know nothing of your reasons for persisting in this investigation. It is quite irregular, I assure you. I don't know that ever in the course of my life I knew quite such a case. A clergyman performs many functions simply as a ministerial official. I should think that the most natural way of procedure would be to ask Mr. Wickersham."

"Certainly it might be. But whatever my reason may be, I have come to ask you. As a matter of fact, Mr. Wickersham took this young girl away from her home. I taught her when she was a school-girl. Her grandfather, who brought her up, is a friend of mine. I wish to clear her good name. I have reason to think that she was legally married here in New York, and that you performed the ceremony, and I came to ask you whether you did so or not. It is a simple question. You can at least say whether you did so or did not. I assumed that as a minister you would be glad to help clear a young woman's good name."

"And I have already answered you," said Mr. Rimmon, who, while Keith was speaking, had been forming his reply.

Keith flushed.

"Why, you have not answered me at all. If you have, you can certainly have no objection to doing me the favor of repeating it. Will you do me the favor to repeat it? Did you or did you not marry Ferdy Wickersham to a young girl about three years ago?"

"My dear sir, I have told you that I do not recognize your right to interrogate me in this manner. I know nothing about your authority to pursue this investigation, and I refuse to continue this conversation any longer."

"Then you refuse to give me any information whatever?" Keith was now very angry, and, as usual, very quiet, with a certain line about his mouth, and his eyes very keen.

"I do most emphatically refuse to give you any information whatever. I decline, indeed, to hold any further communication with you," (Keith was yet quieter,) "and I may add that I consider your entrance here an intrusion and your manner little short of an impertinence." He rose on his toes and fell on his heels, with the motion which Keith had remarked the first time he met him.

Keith fastened his eye on him.

"You do?" he said. "You think all that? You consider even my entrance to ask you, a

minister of the Gospel, a question that any good man would have been glad to answer, 'an intrusion'? Now I am going; but before I go I wish to tell you one or two things. I have heard reports about you, but I did not believe them. I have known men of your cloth, the holiest men on earth, saints of God, who devoted their lives to doing good. I was brought up to believe that a clergyman must be a good man. I could not credit the stories I have heard coupled with your name. I now believe them true, or, at least, possible."

Mr. Rimmon's face was purple with rage. He stepped forward with uplifted hand.

"How dare you, sir!" he began.

"I dare much more," said Keith, quietly.

"You take advantage of my cloth—!"

"Oh, no; I do not. I have one more thing to say to you before I go. I wish to tell you that one of the shrewdest detectives in New York is at work on this case. I advise you to be careful, for when you fall you will fall far. Good day."

He left Mr. Rimmon shaken and white. His indefinite threats had struck him more deeply than any direct charge could have done. For

Mr. Rimmon knew of acts of which Keith could not have dreamed.

When he rose he went to his sideboard, and, taking out a bottle, poured out a stiff drink and tossed it off. "I feel badly," he said to himself: "I have allowed that—that fellow to excite me, and Dr. Splint said I must not get excited. I did pretty well, though; I gave him not the least information, and yet I did not tell a falsehood, an actual falsehood."

With the composure that the stimulant brought, a thought occurred to him. He sat down and wrote a note to Wickersham, and, marking it, "Private," sent it by a messenger.

The note read:

"DEAR FERDY: I must see you without an hour's delay on a matter of the greatest possible importance. Tripper-business. Your friend K. has started investigation; claims to have inside facts. I shall wait at my house for reply. If impossible for you to come immediately, I will run down to your office.

"Yours, RIMMON."

When Mr. Wickersham received this note, he was in his office. He frowned as he glanced at the handwriting. He said to himself:

"He wants more money, I suppose. He is always after money, curse him. He must deal in some other office as well as in this." He started to toss the note aside, but on second thought he tore it open. For a moment he looked puzzled, then a blank expression passed over his face.

He turned to the messenger-boy, who was waiting and chewing gum with the stolidity of an automaton.

"Did they tell you to wait for an answer?"

"Sure!"

He leant over and scribbled a line and sealed it. "Take that back."

"Yes, sir." The automaton departed, glancing from side to side and chewing diligently.

The note read: "Will meet you at club at five."

As the messenger passed up the street, a smallish man who had come down-town on the same car with him, and had been reading a newspaper on the street for some little time, crossed over and accosted him.

"Can you take a note for me?"

"Where to?"

"Up-town. Where are you going?"

The boy showed his note.

"Um—hum! Well, my note will be right on your way." He scribbled a line. It read: "Can't be back till eight. Look out for Shepherd. Pay boy 25 if delivered before four."

"You drop this at that number before four o'clock and you'll get a quarter."

Then he passed on.

That afternoon Keith walked up toward the Park. All day he had been trying to find Phrony, and laying plans for her relief when she should be found. The avenue was thronged with gay equipages and richly dressed women, yet among all his friends in New York there was but one woman to whom he could apply in such a case—Alice Lancaster. Old Mrs. Wentworth would have been another, but he could not go to her now, since his breach with Norman. He knew that there were hundreds of good, kind women; they were all about him, but he did not know them. He had chosen his friends in another set. The fact that he knew no others to whom he could apply struck a sort of chill to his heart. He felt lonely and depressed. He determined to go to Dr. Templeton. There, at least, he was sure of sympathy.

He turned to go back down-town, and at a little distance caught sight of Lois Huntington. Suddenly a light appeared to break in on his

gloom. Here was a woman to whom he could confide his trouble with the certainty of sympathy. As they walked along he told her of Phrony; of her elopement; of her being deserted; and of his chance meeting with her and her disappearance again. He did not mention Wickersham, for he felt that until he had the proof of his marriage he had no right to do so.

"Why, I remember that old man, Mr. Rawson," said Lois. "It was where my father stayed for a while?" Her voice was full of tenderness.

"Yes. It is his granddaughter."

"I remember her kindness to me. We must find her. I will help you." Her face was sweet with tender sympathy, her eyes luminous with firm resolve.

Keith gazed at her with a warm feeling surging about his heart. Suddenly the color deepened in her cheeks; her expression changed; a sudden flame seemed to dart into her eyes.

"I wish I knew that man!"

"What would you do?" demanded Keith, smiling at her fierceness.

"I'd make him suffer all his life." She looked the incarnation of vengeance.

"Such a man would be hard to make suffer," hazarded Keith.

"Not if I could find him."

Keith soon left her to carry out his determination, and Lois went to see Mrs. Lancaster, and told her the story she had heard. It found sympathetic ears, and the next day Lois and Mrs. Lancaster were hard at work quietly trying to find the unfortunate woman. They went to Dr. Templeton; but, unfortunately, the old man was ill in bed.

The next afternoon, Keith caught sight of Lois walking up the street with some one; and when he got nearer her it was Wickersham. They were so absorbed that Keith passed without either of them seeing him. He walked on with more than wonder in his heart. The meeting, however, had been wholly accidental on Lois's part.

Wickersham of late had frequently fallen in with Lois when she was out walking. And this afternoon he had hardly joined her when she began to speak of the subject that had been uppermost in her mind all day. She did not mention any names, but told the story just as she had heard it.

Fortunately for Wickersham, she was so much

engrossed in her recital that she did not observe her companion's face until he had recovered himself. He had fallen a little behind her and did not interrupt her until he had quite mastered himself. Then he asked quietly:

"Where did you get that story?"

"Mr. Keith told me."

"And he said the man who did that was a 'gentleman'?"

"No, he did not say that; he did not give me the least idea who it was. Do you know who it was?"

The question was so unexpected that Wickersham for a moment was confounded. Then he saw that she was quite innocent. He almost gasped.

"I? How could I? I have heard that story —that is, something of it. It is not as Mr. Keith related it. He has some of the facts wrong. I will tell you the true story if you will promise not to say anything about it."

Lois promised.

"Well, the truth is that the poor creature was crazy; she took it into her head that she was married to some one, and ran away from home to try and find him. At one time she said it was a Mr. Wagram; then it was a man named

Plume, a drunken sot; then I think she for a time fancied it was Mr. Keith himself; and"—he glanced at her quickly—"I am not sure she did not claim me once. I knew her slightly. Poor thing! she was quite insane."

"Poor thing!" sighed Lois, softly. She felt more kindly toward Wickersham than she had ever done before.

"I shall do what I can to help you find her," he added.

"Thank you. I hope you may be successful."

"I hope so," said Wickersham, sincerely.

That evening Wickersham called on Mr. Rimmon, and the two were together for some time. The meeting was not wholly an amicable one. Wickersham demanded something that Mr. Rimmon was unwilling to comply with, though the former made him an offer at which his eyes glistened. He had offered to carry his stock for him as long as he wanted it carried. Mr. Rimmon showed him his register to satisfy him that no entry had been made there of the ceremony he had performed that night a few years before; but he was unwilling to write him a certificate that he had not performed such a ceremony. He was not willing to write a falsehood.

Wickersham grew angry.

"Now look here, Rimmon," he said, "you know perfectly well that I never meant to marry that—to marry any one. You know that I was drunk that night, and did not know what I was doing, and that what I did was out of kindness of heart to quiet the poor little fool."

"But you married her in the presence of a witness," said Mr. Rimmon, slowly. "And I gave him her certificate."

"You must have been mistaken. I have the affidavit of the man that he signed nothing of the kind. I give you my word of honor as to that. Write me the letter I want." He pushed the decanter on the table nearer to Rimmon, who poured out a drink and took it slowly. It appeared to give him courage, for after a moment he shook his head.

"I cannot."

Wickersham looked at him with level eyes.

"You will do it, or I will sell you out," he said coldly.

"You cannot. You promised to carry that stock for me till I could pay up the margins."

"Write me that letter, or I will turn you out of your pulpit. You know what will happen if I tell what I know of you."

The other man's face turned white.

"You would not be so base."

Wickersham rose and buttoned up his coat.

"It will be in the papers day after to-morrow."

"Wait," gasped Rimmon. "I will see what I can say." He poured a drink out of the decanter, and gulped it down. Then he seized a pen and a sheet of paper and began to write. He wrote with care.

"Will this do?" he asked tremulously.

"Yes."

"You promise not to use it unless you have to?"

"Yes."

"And to carry the stock for me till it reacts and lets me out?"

"I will make no more promises."

"But you did promise—," began Mr. Rimmon.

Wickersham put the letter in his pocket, and taking up his hat, walked out without a word. But his eyes glinted with a curious light.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALICE LANCASTER FINDS PHRONY

MR. RIMMON was calling at Mrs. Lancaster's a few days after his interview with Keith and the day following the interview with Wickersham. Mr. Rimmon called at Mrs. Lancaster's quite frequently of late. They had known each other a long time, almost ever since Mr. Rimmon had been an acolyte at his uncle Dr. Little's church, when the stout young man had first discovered the slim, straight figure and pretty face, with its blue eyes and rosy mouth, in one of the best pews, with a richly dressed lady beside her. He had soon learned that this was Miss Alice Yorke, the only daughter of one of the wealthiest men in town. Miss Alice was then very devout: just at the age and stage when she bent particularly low on all the occasions when such bowing is held seemly. And the mind

of the young man was not unnaturally affected by her devoutness.

Since then Mr. Rimmon had never quite banished her from his mind, except, of course, during the brief interval when she had been a wife. When she became a widow she resumed her place with renewed power. And of late Mr. Rimmon had begun to have hope.

Now Mr. Rimmon was far from easy in his mind. He knew something of Keith's attention to Mrs. Lancaster; but it had never occurred to him until lately that he might be successful. Wickersham he had feared at times; but Wickersham's habits had reassured him. Mrs. Lancaster would hardly marry him. Now, however, he had an uneasy feeling that Keith might injure him, and he called partly to ascertain how the ground lay, and partly to forestall any possible injury Keith might do. To his relief, he found Mrs. Lancaster more cordial than usual. The line of conversation he adopted was quite spiritual, and he felt elevated by it. Mrs. Lancaster also was visibly impressed. Presently she said: "Mr. Rimmon, I want you to do me a favor."

"Even to the half of my kingdom," said Mr.

Rimmon, bowing with his plump hand on his plump bosom.

"It is not so much as that; it is only a little of your time and, maybe, a little of your company. I have just heard of a poor young woman here who seems to be in quite a desperate way. She has been abandoned by her husband, and is now quite ill. The person who told me, one of those good women who are always seeking out such cases, tells me that she has rarely seen a more pitiable case. The poor thing is absolutely destitute. Mrs. King tells me she has seen better days."

For some reason, perhaps, that the circumstances called up not wholly pleasant associations, Mr. Rimmon's face fell a little at the picture drawn. He did not respond with the alacrity Mrs. Lancaster had expected.

"Of course, I will do it, if you wish it—or I could have some of our workers look up the case, and, if the facts warrant it, could apply some of our alms to its relief. I should think, however, the woman is rather a fit subject for a hospital. Why hasn't she been sent to a hospital, I wonder?"

"I don't know. No, that is not exactly what I meant," declared Mrs. Lancaster. "I thought I

would go myself, and that, as Dr. Templeton is ill, perhaps you would go with me. She seems to be in great distress of mind, and possibly you might be able to comfort her. I have never forgotten what an unspeakable comfort your uncle was when we were in trouble years ago."

"Oh, of course, I will go with you," said the divine. "There is no place, dear lady, where I would not go in such company," he added, his head as much on one side as his stout neck would allow, and his eyes as languishing as he dared make them.

Mrs. Lancaster, however, did not appear to notice this. Her face did not change.

"Very well, then: we will go to-morrow. I will come around and pick you up. I will get the address."

So the following morning Mrs. Lancaster's carriage stopped in front of the comfortable house which adjoined Mr. Rimmon's church, and after a little while that gentleman came down the steps. He was not in a happy frame of mind, for stocks had fallen heavily the day before, and he had just received a note from Ferdy Wickersham. However, as he settled his plump person beside the lady, the Rev. William H. Rimmon was as well-satisfied-looking as any

man on earth could be. Who can blame him if he thought how sweet it would be if he could drive thus always!

The carriage presently stopped at the entrance of a narrow street that ran down toward the river. The coachman appeared unwilling to drive down so wretched an alley, and waited for further instructions. After a few words the clergyman and Mrs. Lancaster got out.

"You wait here, James; we will walk." They made their way down the street, through a multitude of curious children with one common attribute, dirt, examining the numbers on either side, and commiserating the poor creatures who had to live in such squalor.

Presently Mrs. Lancaster stopped.

"This is the number."

It was an old house between two other old houses.

Mrs. Lancaster made some inquiries of a slatternly woman who sat sewing just inside the doorway, and the latter said there was such a person as she asked for in a room on the fourth floor. She knew nothing about her except that she was very sick and mostly out of her head. The health-doctor had been to see her, and talked about sending her to a hospital.

The three made their way up the narrow stairs and through the dark passages, so dark that matches had to be lighted to show them the way. Several times Mr. Rimmon protested against Mrs. Lancaster going farther. Such holes were abominable; some one ought to be prosecuted for it. Finally the woman stopped at a door.

"She's in here." She pushed the door open without knocking, and walked in, followed by Mrs. Lancaster and Mr. Rimmon. It was a cupboard hardly more than ten feet square, with a little window that looked out on a dead-wall not more than an arm's-length away.

A bed, a table made of an old box, and another box which served as a stool, constituted most of the furniture, and in the bed, under a ragged coverlid, lay the form of the sick woman.

"There's a lady and a priest come to see you," said the guide, not unkindly. She turned to Mrs. Lancaster. "I don't know as you can make much of her. Sometimes she's right flighty."

The sick woman turned her head a little and looked at them out of her sunken eyes.

"Thank you. Won't you be seated?" she said, with a politeness and a softness of tone that sounded almost uncanny coming from such a source.

"It is he! 'T is he!" she exclaimed.

"We heard that you were sick, and have come to see if we could not help you," said Mrs. Lancaster, in a tone of sympathy, leaning over the bed.

"Yes," said Mr. Rimmon, in his full, rich voice, which made the little room resound; "it is our high province to minister to the sick, and through the kindness of this dear lady we may be able to remove you to more commodious quarters—to some one of the charitable institutions which noble people like our friend here have endowed for such persons as yourself."

Something about the full-toned voice with its rising inflection caught the invalid's attention, and she turned her eyes on him with a quick glance, and, half raising her head, scanned his face closely.

"Mr. Rimmon, here, may be able to help you in other ways too," Mrs. Lancaster again began; but she got no further. The name appeared to electrify the woman.

With a shriek she sat up in bed.

"It is he! 'Tis he!" she cried. "You are the very one. You will help me, won't you? You will find him and bring him back to me?" She reached out her thin arms to him in an agony of supplication.

"I will help you,—I shall be glad to do so,—but whom am I to bring back? How can I help you?"

"My husband—Ferdy—Mr. Wickersham. I am the girl you married that night to Ferdy Wickersham. Don't you remember? You will bring him back to me? I know he would come if he knew."

The effect that her words, and even more her earnestness, produced was remarkable. Mrs. Lancaster stood in speechless astonishment.

Mr. Rimmon for a moment turned ashy pale. Then he recovered himself.

"She is quite mad," he said in a low tone to Mrs. Lancaster. "I think we had better go. She should be removed to an asylum."

But Mrs. Lancaster could not go. Just then the woman stretched out her arms to her.

"You will help me? You are a lady. I loved him so. I gave up all for him. He married me. Didn't you marry us, sir? Say you did. Mr. Plume lost the paper, but you will give me another, won't you?"

The commiseration in Mr. Rimmon's pale face grew deeper and deeper. He rolled his eyes and shook his head sadly.

"Quite mad—quite mad," he said in an un-

dertone. And, indeed, the next moment it appeared but too true, for with a laugh the poor creature began to babble of her child and its beauty. "Just like its father. Dark eyes and brown hair. Won't he be glad to see it when he comes? Have you children?" she suddenly asked Mrs. Lancaster.

"No." She shook her head.

Then a strange thing happened.

"I am so sorry for you," the poor woman said. And the next second she added: "I want to show mine to Alice Yorke. She is the only lady I know in New York. I used to know her when I was a young girl, and I used to be jealous of her, because I thought Ferdy was in love with her. But he was not, never a bit."

"Come away," said Mr. Rimmon to Mrs. Lancaster. "She is crazy and may become violent."

But he was too late; the whole truth was dawning on Mrs. Lancaster. A faint likeness had come to her, a memory of a far-back time. She ignored him, and stepped closer to the bed.

"What is your name?" she asked in a kind voice, bending toward the woman and taking her hand.

"Euphronia Tripper; but I am now Mrs.

Wickersham. He married us." She turned her deep eyes on Mr. Rimmon. At sight of him a change came over her face.

"Where is my husband?" she demanded. "I wrote to you to bring him. Won't you bring him?"

"Quite mad—quite mad!" repeated Mr. Rimmon, shaking his head solemnly, and turning his gaze on Mrs. Lancaster. But he saw his peril. Mrs. Lancaster took no notice of him. She began to talk to the woman at the door, and gave her a few directions, together with some money. Then she advanced once more to the bed.

"I want to make you comfortable. I will send some one to take care of you." She shook hands with her softly, pulled down her veil, and then, half turning to Mr. Rimmon, said quietly, "I am ready."

As they stepped into the street, Mr. Rimmon observed at a little distance a man who had something familiar about him, but the next second he passed out of sight.

Mrs. Lancaster walked silently down the dirty street without turning her head or speaking to the preacher, who stepped along a little behind her, his mind full of misgiving.

Mr. Rimmon, perhaps, did as hard thinking in those few minutes as he had ever done during the whole course of his life. It was a serious and delicate position. His reputation, his position, perhaps even his profession, depended on the result. He must sound his companion and placate her at any cost.

"That is one of the saddest spectacles I ever saw," he began.

To this Mrs. Lancaster vouchsafed no reply.

"She is quite mad."

"No wonder!"

"Ah, yes. What do you think of her?"

"That she is Ferdy Wickersham's wife—or ought to be."

"Ah, yes." Here was a gleam of light. "But she is so insane that very little reliance should be placed on anything that she says. In such instances, you know, women make the most preposterous statements and believe them. In her condition, she might just as well have claimed me for her husband."

Mrs. Lancaster recognized this, and looked just a little relieved. She turned as if about to speak, but shut her lips tightly and walked on to the waiting carriage. And during the rest of the return home she scarcely uttered a word.

An hour later Ferdy Wickersham was seated in his private office, when Mr. Rimmon walked in.

Wickersham greeted him with more courtesy than he usually showed him.

"Well," he said, "what is it?"

"Well, it's come."

Wickersham laughed unmirthfully. "What? You have been found out? Which commandment have you been caught violating?"

"No; it's you," said Mr. Rimmon, his eyes on Wickersham, with a gleam of retaliation in them. "Your wife has turned up." He was gratified to see Wickersham's cold face turn white. It was a sweet revenge.

"My wife! I have no wife." Wickersham looked him steadily in the eyes.

"You had one, and she is in town."

"I have no wife," repeated Wickersham, firmly, not taking his eyes from the clergyman's face. What he saw there did not satisfy him. "I have your statement."

The other hesitated and reflected.

"I wish you would give me that back. I was in great distress of mind when I gave you that."

"You did not give it," said Wickersham. "You sold it." His lip curled.

"I was—what you said you were when it occurred," said Mr. Rimmon. "I was not altogether responsible."

"You were sober enough to make me carry a thousand shares of weak stock for you till yesterday, when it fell twenty points," said Wickersham. "Oh, I guess you were sober enough."

"She is in town," said Rimmon, in a dull voice.

"Who says so?"

"I have seen her."

"Where is she?"—indifferently.

"She is ill. She is mad."

Wickersham's face settled a little. His eyes blinked as if a blow had been aimed at him nearly. Then he recovered his poise.

"How mad?"

"As mad as a March hare."

"You can attend to it," he said, looking the clergyman full in the face. "I don't want her to suffer. There will be some expense. Can you get her into a comfortable place for—for a thousand dollars?"

"I will try. The poor creature would be better off," said the other, persuading himself. "She cannot last long. She is a very ill woman."

Wickersham either did not hear or pretended not to hear.

"You go ahead and do it. I will send you the money the day after it is done," he said. "Money is very tight to-day, almost a panic at the board."

"That stock? You will not trouble me about it?"

Wickersham growled something about being very busy, and rose and bowed the visitor out. The two men shook hands formally at the door of the inner office; but it was a malevolent look that Wickersham shot at the other's stout back as he walked out.

As Mr. Rimmon came out of the office he caught sight of the short, stout man he had seen in the street to which he had gone with Mrs. Lancaster. Suddenly the association of ideas brought to him Keith's threat. He was shadowed. A perspiration broke out over him.

Wickersham went back to his private office, and began once more on his books. What he saw there was what he began to see on all sides: ruin. He sat back in his chair and reflected. His face, which had begun to grow thinner of late, as well as harder, settled more and more until it looked like gray stone. Presently he

rose, and locking his desk carefully, left his office.

As he reached the street, a man, who had evidently been waiting for him, walked up and spoke to him. He was a tall, thin, shabby man, with a face and figure on which drink was written ineffaceably. Wickersham, without looking at him, made an angry gesture and hastened his step. The other, however, did the same, and at his shoulder began to whine.

"Mr. Wickersham, just a word."

"Get out," said Wickersham, still walking on. "I told you never to speak to me again."

"I have a paper that you'd give a million dollars to get hold of."

Wickersham's countenance showed not the least change.

"If you don't keep away from here, I'll hand you over to the police."

"If you'll just give me a dollar I'll swear never to trouble you again. I have not had a mouthful to eat to-day. You won't let me starve?"

"Yes, I will. Starve and be —— to you!" He suddenly stopped and faced the other. "Plume, I wouldn't give you a cent if you were actually starving. Do you see that policeman? If you don't leave me this minute, I'll hand

you over to him. And if you ever speak to me again or write to me again, or if I find you on the street about here, I'll arrest you and send you down for blackmail and stealing. Now do you understand?"

The man turned and silently shuffled away, his face working and a glint in his bleared eye.

An evening or two later Dave Dennison reported to Keith that he had found Phrony. Dave's face was black with hate, and his voice was tense with suppressed feeling.

"How did you find her?" inquired Keith.

"Shadowed the preacher. Knew he and that man had been confabbin'. She's clean gone," he added. "They've destroyed her. She didn't know me." His face worked, and an ominous fire burned in his eyes.

"We must get her home."

"She can't go. You'd never know her. We'll have to put her in an asylum."

Something in his voice made Keith look at him. He met his gaze.

"They're getting ready to do it—that man and the preacher. But I don't mean 'em to have anything more to do with her. They've done their worst. Now let 'em keep away from her."

Keith nodded his acquiescence.

That evening Keith went to see a doctor he knew, and next day, through his intervention, Phrony was removed to the private ward of an asylum, where she was made as comfortable as possible.

It was evident that she had not much longer to stay. But God had been merciful to her. She babbled of her baby and her happiness at seeing it soon. And a small, strongly built man with grave eyes sat by her in the ambulance, and told her stories of it with a fertility of invention that amazed the doctor who had her in charge.

When Mr. Rimmon's agents called next day to make the preliminary arrangements for carrying out his agreement with Wickersham, they found the room empty. The woman who had charge of the house had been duly "fixed" by Dave, and she told a story sufficiently plausible to pass muster. The sick woman had disappeared at night and had gone she did not know where. She was afraid she might have made away with herself, as she was out of her head. This was verified, and this was the story that went back to Mr. Rimmon and finally to Ferdy Wickersham. A little later the body of a wo-

man was found in the river, and though there was nothing to identify her, it was stated in one of the papers that there was good ground for believing that she was the demented woman whose disappearance had been reported the week before.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE

ONE day after Phrony was removed, Keith was sitting in the office he had taken in New York, working on the final papers which were to be exchanged when his deal should be completed, when there was a tap at the door. A knock at the door is almost as individual as a voice. There was something about this knock that awakened associations in Keith's mind. It was not a woman's tap, yet Terpy and Phrony Tripper both sprang into Keith's mind.

Almost at the same moment the door opened slowly, and pausing on the threshold stood J. Quincy Plume. But how changed from the Mr. Plume of yore, the jovial and jocund manager of the Gumbolt *Whistle,* or the florid and flowery editor of the New Leeds *Clarion!*

The apparition in the door was a shabby representation of what J. Quincy Plume had been

in his palmy days. He bore the last marks of extreme dissipation; his eyes were dull, his face bloated, and his hair thin and long. His clothes looked as if they had served him by night as well as by day for a long time. His shoes were broken, and his hat, once the emblem of his station and high spirits, was battered and rusty.

"How are you, Mr. Keith?" he began boldly enough. But his assumption of something of his old air of bravado died out under Keith's icy and steady gaze, and he stepped only inside of the room, and, taking off his hat, waited uneasily.

"What do you want of me?" demanded Keith, leaning back in his chair and looking at him coldly.

"Well, I thought I would like to have a little talk with you about a matter—"

Keith, without taking his eyes from his face, shook his head slowly.

"About a friend of yours," continued Plume.

Again Keith shook his head very slowly.

"I have a little information that might be of use to you—that you'd like to have."

"I don't want it."

"You would if you knew what it was."

"No."

"Yes, you would. It's about Squire Rawson's granddaughter—about her marriage to that man Wickersham."

"How much do you want for it?" demanded Keith.

Plume advanced slowly into the room and looked at a chair.

"Don't sit down. How much do you want for it?" repeated Keith.

"Well, you are a rich man now, and—"

"I thought so." Keith rose. "However rich I am, I will not pay you a cent." He motioned Plume to the door.

"Oh, well, if that's the way you take it!" Plume drew himself up and stalked to the door. Keith reseated himself and again took up his pen.

At the door Plume turned and saw that Keith had put him out of his mind and was at work again.

"Yes, Keith, if you knew what information I have—"

Keith sat up suddenly.

"Go out of here!"

"If you'd only listen—"

Keith stood up, with a sudden flame in his eyes.

"Go on, I say. If you do not, I will put you out. It is as much as I can do to keep my hands off you. You could not say a word that I would believe on any subject."

"I will swear to this."

"Your oath would add nothing to it."

Plume waited, and after a moment's reflection began in a different key.

"Mr. Keith, I did not come here to sell you anything—"

"Yes, you did."

"No, I did not. I did not come—only for that. If I could have sold it, I don't say I wouldn't, for I need money—the Lord knows how much I need it! I have not a cent in the world to buy me a mouthful to eat—or drink. I came to tell you something that only *I* know—"

"I have told you that I would not believe you on oath," began Keith, impatiently.

"But you will, for it is true; and I tell it not out of love for you (though I never disliked—I always liked you—would have liked you if you'd have let me), but out of hate for that—. That man has treated me shamefully—worse than a yellow dog! I've done for that man what I wouldn't have done for my brother. You know what I've done for him, Mr. Keith, and now

when he's got no further use for me, he kicks me out into the street and threatens to give me to the police if I come to him again."

Keith's expression changed. There was no doubt now that for once Quincy Plume was sincere. The hate in his bleared eyes and bloated face was unfeigned.

"Give me to the police! I'll give him to the police!" he broke out in a sudden flame at Keith's glance of inspection. "He thinks he has been very smart in taking from me all the papers. He thinks no one will believe me on my mere word, but I've got a paper he don't know of." His hand went to the breast of his threadbare coat with an angry clutch. "I've got the marriage lines of his wife."

One word caught Keith, and his interest awoke.

"What wife?" he asked as indifferently as he could.

"His wife,—his lawful wife,—Squire Rawson's granddaughter, Phrony Tripper. I was at the weddin'—I was a witness. He thought he could get out of it, and he was half drunk; but he married her."

"Where? When? You were present?"

"Yes. They were married by a preacher

named Rimmon, and he gave me her certificate, and I swore to her I had lost it: *he* got me to do it—the scoundrel! He wanted me to give it to him; but I swore to him I had lost it, too. I thought it would be of use some of these days." A gleam of the old craftiness shone in his eyes.

Keith gazed at the man in amazement. His unblushing effrontery staggered him.

"Would you mind letting me see that certificate?"

Plume hesitated and licked his lips like a dog held back from a bone. Keith noted it.

"I do not want you to think that I will give you any money for it, for I will not," he added quietly, his gray eyes on him.

For a moment Plume was so taken aback that his face became a blank. Then, whether it was that the very frankness of the speech struck home to him or that he wished to secure a fragment of esteem from Keith, he recovered himself.

"I don't expect any money for it, Mr. Keith. I don't want any money for it. I will not only show you this paper, I will give it to you."

"It is not yours to give," said Keith. "It belongs to Mrs. Wickersham. I will see that she gets it if you deliver it to me."

"That's so," ejaculated Plume, as if the thought had never occurred to him before. "I want her to have it, but you'd better keep it for her. That man will get it away from her. You don't know him as I do. You don't know what he'd do on a pinch. I tell you he is a gambler for life. I have seen him sit at the board and stake sums that would have made me rich for life. Besides," he added, as if he needed some other reason for giving it up, "I am afraid if he knew I had it he'd get it from me in some way."

He walked forward and handed the paper to Keith, who saw at a glance that it was what Plume had declared it to be: a marriage certificate, dirty and worn, but still with signatures that appeared to be genuine. Keith's eyes flashed with satisfaction as he read the name of the Rev. William H. Rimmon and Plume's name, evidently written with the same ink at the same time.

"Now," said Keith, looking up from the paper, "I will see that Mrs. Wickersham's family is put in possession of this paper."

"Couldn't you lend me a small sum, Mr. Keith," asked Plume, wheedlingly, "just for old times' sake? I know I have done you wrong

and given you good cause to hate me, but it wasn't my fault, an' I've done you a favor to-day, anyhow."

Keith looked at him for a second, and put his hand in his pocket.

"I'll pay you back, as sure as I live—" began Plume, cajolingly.

"No, you will not," said Keith, sharply. "You could not if you would, and would not if you could, and I would not lend you a cent or have a business transaction with you for all the money in New York. I will give you this—for the person you have most injured in life. Now, don't thank me for it, but go."

Plume took, with glistening eyes and profuse thanks, the bills that were handed out to him, and shambled out of the room.

That night Keith, having shown the signatures to a good expert, who pronounced them genuine, telegraphed Dr. Balsam to notify Squire Rawson that he had the proof of Phrony's marriage. The Doctor went over to see the old squire. He mentioned the matter casually, for he knew his man. But as well as he knew him, he found himself mistaken in him.

"I know that," he said quietly, "but what I want is to find Phrony." His deep eyes glowed for a while and suddenly flamed. "I'm a rich

man,'' he broke out, ''but I'd give every dollar I ever owned to get her back, and to get my hand once on that man.''

The deep fire glowed for a while and then grew dull again, and the old man sank back into his former grim silence.

The Doctor looked at him commiseratingly. Keith had written him fully of Phrony and her condition, and he had decided to say nothing to the old grandfather.

CHAPTER XXX

"SNUGGLERS' ROOST"

WICKERSHAM began to renew his visits to Mrs. Wentworth, which he had discontinued for a time when he had found himself repulsed. The repulse had stimulated his desire to win her; but he had a further motive. Among other things, she might ask for an accounting of the money he had had of her, and he wanted more money. He must keep up appearances, or others might pounce upon him.

When he began again, it was on a new line. He appealed to her sympathy. If he had forgotten himself so far as to ask for more than friendship, she would, he hoped, forgive him. She could not find a truer friend. He would never offend her so again; but he must have her friendship, or he might do something desperate.

Fortunately for him, Wickersham had a good advocate at court. Mrs. Wentworth was very

lonely and unhappy just then, and the plea prevailed. She forgave him, and Wickersham again began to be a visitor at the house.

But deeper than these lay another motive. While following Mrs. Wentworth he had been thrown with Lois Huntington. Her freshness, her beauty, the charm of her girlish figure, the unaffected gayety of her spirits, attracted him, and he had paused in his other pursuit to captivate her, as he might have stepped aside to pluck a flower beside the way. To his astonishment, she declined the honor; more, she laughed at him. It teased him to find himself balked by a mere country girl, and from this moment he looked on her with new eyes. The unexpected revelation of a deeper nature than most he had known astonished him.

Since their interview on the street Lois received him with more friendliness than she had hitherto shown him. In fact, the house was a sad one these days, and any diversion was welcome. The discontinuance of Keith's visits had been so sudden that Lois had felt it all the more. She had no idea of the reason, and set it down to the score of his rumored success with Mrs. Lancaster. She, too, could play the game of pique, and she did it well. She accordingly

showed Wickersham more favor than she had ever shown him before. While, therefore, he kept up his visits to Mrs. Norman, he was playing all the time his other game with her cousin, knowing the world well enough to be sure that it would not believe his attentions to the latter had any serious object. In this he was not mistaken. The buzz that coupled his name with Mrs. Wentworth's was soon as loud as ever.

Finally Lois decided to take matters in her own hands. She would appeal to Mr. Wickersham himself. He had talked to her of late in a manner quite different from the sneering cynicism which he aired when she first met him. In fact, no one could hold higher sentiments than he had expressed about women or about life. Mr. Keith himself had never held loftier ideals than Mr. Wickersham had declared to her. She began to think that the tittle-tattle that she got bits of whenever she saw Mrs. Nailor or some others was, perhaps, after all, slander, and that Mr. Wickersham was not aware of the injury he was doing Mrs. Wentworth. She would appeal to his better nature. She lay in wait several times without being able to meet him in a way that would not attract attention. At length she

wrote him a note, asking him to meet her on the street, as she wished to speak to him privately.

When Wickersham met her that afternoon at the point she had designated, not far from the Park, he had a curious expression on his cold face.

She was dressed in a perfectly simple, dark street-costume which fitted without a wrinkle her willowy figure, and a big black hat with a single large feather shaded her face and lent a shadow to her eyes which gave them an added witchery. Wickersham thought he had never known her so pretty or so chic. He had not seen as handsome a figure that day, and he had sat at the club window and scanned the avenue with an eye for fine figures.

She held out her hand in the friendliest way, and looking into his eyes quite frankly, said, with the most natural of voices:

"Well, I know you think I have gone crazy, and are consumed with curiosity to know what I wanted with you?"

"I don't know about the curiosity," he said, smiling at her. "Suppose we call it interest. You don't have to be told now that I shall be only too delighted if I am fortunate enough to be of any service to you." He bent down and

looked so deep into her eyes that she drew a little back.

"The fact is, I am plotting a little treason," she said, with a blush, slightly embarrassed.

"By Jove! she is a real beauty," thought Wickersham, noting, with the eye of a connoisseur, the white, round throat, the dainty curves of the slim figure, and the purity of the oval face, in which the delicate color came and went under his gaze.

"Well, if this be treason, I'll make the most of it," he said, with his most fascinating smile. "Treasons, stratagems, and spoils are my game."

"But this may be treason partly against yourself?" She gave a half-glance up at him to see how he took this.

"I am quite used to this, too, my dear girl, I assure you," he said, wondering more and more. She drew back a little at the familiarity.

"Come and let us stroll in the Park," he suggested, and though she demurred a little, he pressed her, saying it was quieter there, and she would have a better opportunity of showing him how he could help her.

They walked along talking, he dealing in light badinage of a flattering kind, which both amused and disturbed her a little, and pres-

ently he turned into a somewhat secluded alley, where he found a bench sheltered and shadowed by the overhanging boughs of a tree.

"Well, here is a good place for confidences." He took her hand and, seating himself, drew her down beside him. "I will pretend that you are a charming dryad, and I—what shall I be?"

"My friend," she said calmly, and drew her hand away from him.

"*Votre ami? Avec tout mon cœur.* I will be your best friend." He held out his hand.

"Then you will do what I ask? You are also a good friend of Mrs. Wentworth?"

A little cloud flitted over his face; but she did not see it.

"We do not speak of the absent when the present holds all we care for," he said lightly.

She took no notice of this, but went on: "I do not think you would wittingly injure any one."

He laughed softly. "Injure any one? Why, of course I would not—I could not. My life is spent in making people have a pleasant time—though some are wicked enough to malign me."

"Well," she said slowly, "I do not think you ought to come to Cousin Louise's so often. You ought not to pay Cousin Louise as much attention as you do."

"What!" He threw back his head and laughed.

"You do not know what an injury you are doing her," she continued gravely. "You cannot know how people are talking about it?"

"Oh, don't I?" he laughed. Then, as out of the tail of his eye he saw her troubled face, he stopped and made his face grave. "And you think I am injuring her!" She did notice the covert cynicism.

"I am sure you are—unwittingly. You do not know how unhappy she is."

An expression very like content stole into his dark eyes.

Lois continued:

"She has not been wise. She has been foolish and unyielding and—oh, I hate to say anything against her, for she has been very kind to me!—She has allowed others to make trouble between her and her husband; but she loves him dearly for all that—and—"

"Oh, she does! You think so!" said Wickersham, with an ugly little gleam under his half-closed lids and a shrewd glance at Lois.

"Yes. Oh, yes, I am sure of it. I know it. She adores him."

"She does, eh?"

"Yes. She would give the world to undo what she has done and win him back."

"She would, eh?" Again that gleam in Wickersham's dark eyes as they slanted a glance at the girl's earnest face.

"I think she had no idea till—till lately how people talked about her, and it was a great shock to her. She is a very proud woman, you know?"

"Yes," he assented, "quite proud."

"She esteems you—your friendship—and likes you ever so much, and all that." She was speaking rapidly now, her sober eyes on Wickersham's face with an appealing look in them. "And she doesn't want to do anything to—to wound you; but I think you ought not to come so often or see her in a way to make people talk—and I thought I'd say so to you." A smile that was a plea for sympathy flickered in her eyes.

Wickersham's mind had been busy. This explained the change in Louise Wentworth's manner of late—ever since he had made the bold declaration of his intention to conquer her. Another idea suggested itself. Could the girl be jealous of his attentions to Mrs. Wentworth? He had had women play such a part; but none

was like this girl. If it was a game it was a deep one. He took his line, and when she ended composed his voice to a low tone as he leant toward her.

"My dear girl, I have listened to every word you said. I am shocked to hear what you tell me. Of course I know people have talked about me,—curse them! they always will talk,—but I had no idea it had gone so far. As you know, I have always taken Mrs. Wentworth's side in the unhappy differences between her and her husband. This has been no secret. I cannot help taking the side of the woman in any controversy. I have tried to stand her friend, notwithstanding what people said. Sometimes I have been able to help her. But—" He paused and took a long breath, his eyes on the ground. Then, leaning forward, he gazed into her face.

"What would you say if I should tell you that my frequent visits to Mrs. Wentworth's house were not to see her—entirely?" He felt his way slowly, watching the effect on her. It had no effect. She did not understand him.

"What do you mean?"

He leant over, and taking hold of her wrist with one hand, he put his other arm around her. "Lois, can you doubt what I mean?" He threw

an unexpected passion into his eyes and into his voice,—he had done it often with success,—and drew her suddenly to him.

Taken by surprise, she, with a little exclamation, tried to draw away from him, but he held her firmly.

"Do you think I went there to see her? Do you give me no credit for having eyes—for knowing the prettiest, sweetest, dearest little girl in New York? I must have concealed my secret better than I thought. Why, Lois, it is you I have been after." His eyes were close to hers and looked deep into them.

She gave an exclamation of dismay and tried to rise. "Oh, Mr. Wickersham, please let me go!" But he held her fast.

"Why, of course, it is yourself."

"Let me go—please let me go, Mr. Wickersham," she exclaimed as she struggled.

"Oh, now don't get so excited," he said, drawing her all the closer to him, and holding her all the tighter. "It is not becoming to your beautiful eyes. Listen to me, my darling. I am not going to hurt you. I love you too much, little girl, and I want your love. Sit down. Listen to me." He tried to kiss her, but his lips just touched her face.

"No; I will not listen." She struggled to her feet, flushed and panting, but Wickersham rose too.

"I will kiss you, you little fool." He caught her, and clasping her with both arms, kissed her twice violently; then, as she gave a little scream, released her. "There!" he said. As he did so she straightened herself and gave him a ringing box on his ear.

"There!" She faced him with blazing eyes.

Angry, and with his cheek stinging, Wickersham seized her again.

"You little devil!" he growled, and kissed her on her cheek again and again.

As he let her go, she faced him. She was now perfectly calm.

"You are not a gentleman," she said in a low, level tone, tears of shame standing in her eyes.

For answer he caught her again.

Then the unexpected happened. At that moment Keith turned a clump of shrubbery a few paces off, that shut out the alley from the bench which Wickersham had selected. For a second he paused, amazed. Then, as he took in the situation, a black look came into his face.

The next second he had sprung to where Wickersham stood, and seizing him by the col-

lar, jerked him around and slapped him full in the face.

"You hound!" He caught him again, the light of fury in his eyes, the primal love of fight that has burned there when men have fought for a woman since the days of Adam, and with a fierce oath hurled him spinning back across the walk, where he measured his length on the ground.

Then Keith turned to the girl:

"Come; I will see you home."

The noise had attracted the attention of others besides Gordon Keith. Just at this juncture a stout policeman turned the curve at a double-quick.

As he did so, Wickersham rose and slipped away.

"What th' devil 'rre ye doin'?" the officer demanded in a rich brogue before he came to a halt. "I'll stop this racket. I'll run ye ivery wan in. I've got ye now, me foine leddy; I've been waitin' for ye for some time." He seized Lois by the arm roughly.

"Let her go. Take your hand off that lady, sir. Don't you dare to touch her." Keith stepped up to him with his eyes flashing and hand raised.

"And you too. I'll tache you to turn this park into—"

"Take your hand off her, or I'll make you sorry for it."

"Oh, you will!" But at the tone of authority he released Lois.

"What is your name? Give me your number. I'll have you discharged for insulting a lady," said Keith.

"Oh, me name's aall right. Me name's Mike Doherty—Sergeant Doherty. I guess ye'll find it on the rolls right enough. And as for insultin' a leddy, that's what I'm goin' to charrge against ye—that and—"

"Why, Mike Doherty!" exclaimed Keith. "I am Mr. Keith—Gordon Keith."

"Mr. Keith! Gordon Keith!" The big officer leant over and looked at Keith in the gathering dusk. "Be jabbers, and so it is! Who's your leddy friend?" he asked in a low voice. "Be George, she's a daisy!"

Keith stiffened. The blood rushed to his face, and he started to speak sharply. He, however, turned to Lois.

"Miss Huntington, this is an old friend of mine. This is Mike Doherty, who used to be the

best man on the ship when I ran the blockade as a boy."

"The verry same," said Mike.

"He used to teach me boxing," continued Keith.

"I taaught him the left upper-cut," nodded the sergeant.

Keith went on and told the story of his coming on a man who was annoying Miss Huntington, but he did not give his name.

"Did ye give him the left upper-cut?" demanded Sergeant Doherty.

"I am not sure that I did not," laughed Keith. "I know he went down over there where you saw him lying—and I have ended one or two misunderstandings with it very satisfactorily."

"Ah, well, then, I'm glad I taaught ye. I'm glad ye've got such a good defender, ma'am. Ye'll pardon what I said when I first coomed up. But I was a little over-het. Ye see, this place is kind o' noted for—for— This place is called 'Snugglers' Roost.' Nobody comes here this time 'thout they're a little aff, and we has arders to look out for 'em."

"I am glad I had two such defenders," said Lois, innocently.

"I'm always glad to meet Mr. Keith's friends

—and his inimies too,'' said the sergeant, taking off his helmet and bowing. ''If I can sarve ye any time, sind worrd to Precin't XX, and I'll be proud to do it.''

As Keith and Lois walked slowly homeward, Lois gave him an account of her interview with Wickersham. Only she did not tell him of his kissing her the first time. She tried to minimize the insult now, for she did not know what Keith might do. He had suddenly grown so quiet.

What she said to Keith, however, was enough to make him very grave. And when he left her at Mrs. Wentworth's house the gravity on his face deepened to grimness. That Wickersham should have dared to insult this young girl as he had done stirred Keith's deepest anger. What Keith did was, perhaps, a very foolish thing. He tried to find him, but failing in this, he wrote him a note in which he told him what he thought of him, and added that if he felt aggrieved he would be glad to send a friend to him and arrange to give him any satisfaction which he might desire.

Wickersham, however, had left town. He had gone West on business, and would not re-

turn for some weeks, the report from his office stated.

On reaching home, Lois went straight to her room and thought over the whole matter. It certainly appeared grave enough to her. She determined that she would never meet Wickersham again, and, further, that she would not remain in the house if she had to do so. Her cheeks burned with shame as she thought of him, and then her heart sank at the thought that Keith might at that moment be seeking him.

Having reached her decision, she sought Mrs. Wentworth.

As soon as she entered the room, Mrs. Wentworth saw that something serious had occurred, and in reply to her question Lois sat down and quietly told the story of having met Mr. Wickersham and of his attempting to kiss her, though she did not repeat what Wickersham had said to her. To her surprise, Mrs. Wentworth burst out laughing.

"On my word, you were so tragic when you came in that I feared something terrible had occurred. Why, you silly creature, do you suppose that Ferdy meant anything by what he did?"

"He meant to insult me—and you," said Lois, with a lift of her head and a flash in her eye.

"Nonsense! He has probably kissed a hundred girls, and will kiss a hundred more if they give him the chance to do so."

"I gave him no chance," said Lois, sitting very straight and stiff, and with a proud dignity which the other might well have heeded.

"Now, don't be silly," said Mrs. Wentworth, with a little hauteur. "Why did you walk in a secluded part of the Park with him?"

"I thought I could help a friend of mine," said Lois.

"Mr. Keith, I suppose!"

"No; *not* Mr. Keith."

"A woman, perhaps?"

"Yes; a woman." She spoke with a hauteur which Mrs. Wentworth had never seen in her.

"Cousin Louise," she said suddenly, after a moment's reflection, "I think I ought to say to you that I will never speak to Mr. Wickersham again."

The color rushed to Mrs. Wentworth's face, and her eyes gave a flash. "You will never do what?" she demanded coldly, looking at her with lifted head.

"I will never meet Mr. Wickersham again."

"You appear to have met him once too often already. I think you do not know what you are saying or whom you are speaking to."

"I do perfectly," said Lois, looking her full in the eyes.

"I think you had better go to your room," said Mrs. Wentworth, angrily.

The color rose to Lois's face, and her eyes were sparkling. Then the color ebbed back again as she restrained herself.

"You mean you wish me to go?" Her voice was calm.

"I do. You have evidently forgotten your place."

"I will go home," she said. She walked slowly to the door. As she reached it she turned and faced Mrs. Wentworth. "I wish to thank you for all your kindness to me; for you have been very kind to me at times, and I wish—" Her voice broke a little, but she recovered herself, and walking back to Mrs. Wentworth, held out her hand. "Good-by."

Mrs. Wentworth, without rising, shook hands with her coldly. "Good-by."

Lois turned and walked slowly from the room.

As soon as she had closed the door she rushed up-stairs, and, locking herself in, threw herself on the bed and burst out crying. The strain had been too great, and the bent bow at last snapped.

An hour or two later there was a knock on her

door. Lois opened it, and Mrs. Wentworth entered. She appeared rather surprised to find Lois packing her trunk.

"Are you really going away?" she asked.

"Yes, Cousin Louise."

"I think I spoke hastily to you. I said one or two things that I regret. I had no right to speak to you as I did," said Mrs. Wentworth.

"No, I do not think you had," said Lois, gravely; "but I will try and never think of it again, but only of your kindness to me."

Suddenly, to her astonishment, Mrs. Wentworth burst out weeping. "You are all against me," she exclaimed—"all! You are all so hard on me!"

Lois sprang toward her, her face full of sudden pity. "Why, Cousin Louise!"

"You are all deserting me. What shall I do! I am so wretched! I am so lonely—so lonely! Oh, I wish I were dead!" sobbed the unhappy woman. "Then, maybe, some one might be sorry for me even if they did not love me."

Lois slipped her arm around her and drew her to her, as if their ages had been reversed. "Don't cry, Cousin Louise. Calm yourself."

Lois drew her down to a sofa, and kneeling beside her, tried to comfort her with tender

words and assurances of her affection. "There, Cousin Louise, I do love you—we all love you. Cousin Norman loves you."

Mrs. Wentworth only sobbed her dissent.

"I will stay. I will not go," said Lois. "If you want me."

The unhappy woman caught her in her arms and thanked her with a humility which was new to the girl. And out of the reconciliation came a view of her which Lois had never seen, and which hardly any one had seen often.

CHAPTER XXXI

TERPY'S LAST DANCE AND WICKERSHAM'S FINAL THROW

CURIOUSLY enough, the interview between Mrs. Lancaster and Lois brought them closer together than before. The older woman seemed to find a new pleasure in the young girl's society, and as often as she could she had the girl at her house. Sometimes, too, Keith was of the party. He held himself in leash, and hardly dared face the fact that he had once more entered on the lane which, beginning among flowers, had proved so thorny in the end. Yet more and more he let himself drift into that sweet atmosphere whose light was the presence of Lois Huntington.

One evening they all went together to see a vaudeville performance that was being much talked about.

Keith had secured a box next the stage. The

theatre was crowded. Wickersham sat in another box with several women, and Keith was aware that he was covertly watching his party. He had never appeared gayer or been handsomer.

The last number but one was a dance by a new danseuse, who, it was stated in the playbills, had just come over from Russia. According to the reports, the Russian court was wild about her, and she had left Europe at the personal request of the Czar. However this might be, it appeared that she could dance. The theatre was packed nightly, and she was the drawing-card.

As the curtain rose, the danseuse made her way to the centre of the stage. She had raven-black hair and brows; but even as she stood, there was something in the pose that seemed familiar to Keith, and as she stepped forward and bowed with a little jerk of her head, and then, with a nod to the orchestra, began to dance, Keith recognized Terpy. That abandon was her own.

As she swept the boxes with her eyes, they fell on Keith, and she started, hesitated, then went on. Next moment she glanced at the box again, and as her eye caught Keith's she gave him a glance of recognition. She was not to be dis-

concerted now, however. She had never danced so well. And she was greeted with raptures of applause. The crowd was wild with delight.

At that moment, from one of the wings, a thin curl of smoke rose and floated up alongside a painted tamarind-tree. It might at first have been only the smoke of a cigar. Next moment, however, a flick of flame stole out and moved up the tree, and a draught of air blew the smoke across the stage. There were a few excited whispers, a rush in the wings; some one in the gallery shouted "Fire!" and just then a shower of sparks from the flaming scenery fell on the stage.

In a second the whole audience was on its feet. In a second more there would have been a panic which must have cost many lives. Keith saw the danger. "Stay in this box," he said. "The best way out is over the stage. I will come for you if necessary." He sprang on the stage, and, with a wave of his arm to the audience, shouted: "Down in your seats! It is all right."

Those nearest the stage, seeing a man stand between them and the fire, had paused, and the hubbub for a moment had ceased. Keith took advantage of it.

"This theatre can be emptied in three minutes if you take your time," he cried; "but the fire is under control."

Terpy had seized the burning piece of scenery and torn it down, and was tearing off the flaming edges with her naked hands. He sprang to Terpy's side. Her filmy dress caught fire, but Keith jerked off his coat and smothered the flame. Just then the water came, and the fire was subdued.

"Strike up that music again," Keith said to the musicians. Then to Terpy he said: "Begin dancing. Dance for your life!" The girl obeyed, and, all blackened as she was, began to dance again. She danced as she had never danced before, and as she danced the people at the rear filed out, while most of those in the body of the house stood and watched her. As the last spark of flame was extinguished the girl stopped, breathless. Thunders of applause broke out, but ceased as Terpy suddenly sank to the floor, clutching with her blackened hands at her throat. Keith caught her, and lowering her gently, straightened her dress. The next moment a woman sprang out of her box and knelt beside him; a woman's arm slipped under the dancer's head, and Lois Huntington, on her

knees, was loosening Terpy's bodice as if she had been a sister.

A doctor came up out of the audience and bent over her, and the curtain rang down.

That night Keith and Lois and Mrs. Lancaster all spent in the waiting-room of the Emergency Hospital. They knew that Terpy's life was ebbing fast. She had swallowed the flame, the doctor said. During the night a nurse came and called for Keith. The dying woman wanted to see him. When Keith reached her bedside, the doctor, in reply to a look of inquiry from him, said: "You can say anything to her; it will not hurt her." He turned away, and Keith seated himself beside her. Her face and hands were swathed in bandages.

"I want to say good-by," she said feebly. "You don't mind now what I said to you that time?" Keith, for answer, stroked the coverlid beside her. "I want to go back home—to Gumbolt.—Tell the boys good-by for me."

Keith said he would—as well as he could, for he had little voice left.

"I want to see *her*," she said presently.

"Whom?" asked Keith.

"The younger one. The one you looked at all the time. I want to thank her for the doll. I ran away."

Lois was sent for, but when she reached the bedside Terpy was too far gone to speak so that she could be understood. But she was conscious enough to know that Lois was at her side and that it was her voice that repeated the Lord's prayer.

The newspapers the next day rang with her praises, and that night Keith went South with her body to lay it on the hillside among her friends, and all of old Gumbolt was there to meet her.

Wickersham, on finding his attempt at explanation to Mrs. Wentworth received with coldness, turned his attentions in another direction. It was necessary. His affairs had all gone wrong of late. He had seen his great fortune disappear under his hands. Men who had not half his ability were succeeding where he had failed. Men who once followed him now held aloof, and refused to be drawn into his most tempting schemes. His enemies were working against him. He would overthrow them yet. Norman Wentworth and Gordon Keith especially he hated.

He began to try his fortune with Mrs. Lancaster again. Now, if ever, appeared a good time. She was indifferent to every man—unless she

cared for Keith. He had sometimes thought she might; but he did not believe it. Keith, of course, would like to marry her; but Wickersham did not believe Keith stood any chance. Though she had refused Wickersham, she had never shown any one else any special favor. He would try new tactics and bear her off before she knew it. He began with a dash. He was quite a different man from what he had been. He even was seen in church, turning on Rimmon a sphinx-like face that a little disconcerted that eloquent person.

Mrs. Lancaster received him with the serene and unruffled indifference with which she received all her admirers, and there were many. She treated him, however, with the easy indulgence with which old friends are likely to be treated for old times' sake; and Wickersham was deceived. Fortune appeared suddenly to smile on him again. Hope sprang up once more.

Mrs. Nailor one day met Lois, and informed her that Mr. Wickersham was now a rival of Mr. Keith's with Mrs. Lancaster, and, what was more, that Norman Wentworth had learned that it was not Wickersham at all, but Mr. Keith who had really caused the trouble between Norman and his wife.

Lois was aghast. She denied vehemently that it was true; but Mrs. Nailor received her denial with amused indulgence.

"Oh, every one knows it," she said. "Mr. Keith long ago cut Ferdy out; and Norman knows it."

Lois went home in a maze. This, then, explained why Mr. Keith had suddenly stopped coming to the house. When he had met her he had appeared as glad as ever to see her, but he had also appeared constrained. He had begun to talk of going away. He was almost the only man in New York that she could call her friend. To think of New York without him made her lonely. He was in love with Mrs. Lancaster, she knew—of that she was sure, notwithstanding Mrs. Nailor's statement. Could Mrs. Lancaster have treated him badly? She had not even cared for her husband, so people said; would she be cruel to Keith?

The more she pondered over it the more unhappy Lois became. Finally, it appeared to her that her duty was plain. If Mrs. Lancaster had rejected Keith for Wickersham, she might set her right. She could, at least, set her right as to the story about him and Mrs. Wentworth.

That afternoon she called on Mrs. Lancaster.

It was in the Spring, and she put on a dainty gown she had just made.

She was received with the sincere cordiality that Alice Lancaster always showed her. She was taken up to her boudoir, a nest of blue satin and sunshine. And there, of all occupations in the world, Mrs. Lancaster, clad in a soft lavender tea-gown, was engaged in mending old clothes. "For my orphans," she said, with a laugh and a blush that made her look charming.

A photograph of Keith stood on the table in a silver frame. When, however, Lois would have brought up the subject of Mr. Keith, his name stuck in her throat.

"I have what the children call 'a swap' for you," said the girl, smiling.

Mrs. Lancaster smiled acquiescingly as she bit off a thread.

"I heard some one say the other day that you were one of those who 'do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.' "

"Oh, how nice! I am not, at all, you know. Still, it is pleasant to deceive people that way. Who said it?"

"Mr. Keith." Lois could not help blushing a little; but she had broken the ice.

"And I have one to return to you. I heard

some one say that you had 'the rare gift of an absolutely direct mind.' That you were like George Washington: you couldn't tell a lie—that truth had its home in your eyes.'' Her eyes were twinkling.

''My! Who said that?'' asked the girl.

''Mr. Keith.''

Lois turned quickly under pretence of picking up something, but she was not quick enough to hide her face from her friend. The red that burned in her cheeks flamed down and made her throat rosy.

Mrs. Lancaster looked at the young girl. She made a pretty picture as she sat leaning forward, the curves of her slim, light-gowned figure showing against the background of blue. Her face was pensive, and she was evidently thinking deeply.

''What are you puzzling over so?''

At the question the color mounted into her cheeks, and the next second a smile lit up her face as she turned her eyes frankly on Mrs. Lancaster.

''You would be amused to know. I was wondering how long you had known Mr. Keith, and what he was like when he was young.''

''When he was young! Do you call him old now? Why, he is only a little over thirty.''

"Is that all! He always seems much older to me, I do not know why. But he has seen so much—done so much. Why, he appears to have had so many experiences! I feel as if no matter what might happen, he would know just what to do. For instance, that story that Cousin Norman told me once of his going down into the flooded mine, and that night at the theatre, when there was the fire—why, he just took charge. I felt as if he would take charge no matter what might happen."

Mrs. Lancaster at first had smiled at the girl's enthusiasm, but before Lois had finished, she had drifted away.

"He would—he would," she repeated, pensively.

"Then that poor girl—what he did for her. I just"— Lois paused, seeking for a word—"trust him!"

Mrs. Lancaster smiled.

"You may," she said. "That is exactly the word."

"Tell me, what was he like when—you first knew him?"

"I don't know—why, he was—he was just what he is now—you could have trusted him—"

"Why didn't you marry him?" asked Lois, her eyes on the other's face.

Mrs. Lancaster looked at her with almost a gasp.

"Why, Lois! What are you talking about? Who says—?"

"He says so. He said he was desperately in love with you."

"Why, Lois—!" began Mrs. Lancaster, with the color mounting to her cheeks. "Well, he has gotten bravely over it," she laughed.

"He has not. He is in love with you now," the young girl said calmly.

Mrs. Lancaster turned and faced her with her mouth open to speak, and read the girl's sincerity in her face. "With me!" She clasped her hands with a pretty gesture over her bosom. A warm feeling suddenly surged to her heart.

The younger woman nodded.

"Yes—and, oh, Mrs. Lancaster, don't treat him badly!" She laid both hands on her arm and looked at her earnestly. "He has loved you always," she continued.

"Loved me! Lois, you are dreaming." But as she said it, Alice's heart was beating.

"Yes, he was talking to me one evening, and he began to tell me of his love for a girl,—a young girl,—and what a part it had played in his life—"

"But I was married," put in Mrs. Lancaster,

seeking for further proof rather than renouncing this.

"Yes, he said she did not care for him; but he had always striven to keep her image in his heart—her image as she was when he knew her and as he imagined her."

Mrs. Lancaster's face for a moment was a study.

"Do you know whom he is in love with now?" she said presently.

"Yes; with you."

"No—not with me; with you." She put her hand on Lois's cheek caressingly, and gazed into her eyes.

The girls's eyes sank into her lap. Her face, which had been growing white and pink by turns, suddenly flamed.

"Mrs. Lancaster, I believe I—" she began in low tones. She raised her eyes, and they met for a moment Mrs. Lancaster's. Something in their depths, some look of sympathy, of almost maternal kindness, struck her, passed through to her long-stilled heart. With a little cry she threw herself into the other's arms and buried her burning face in her lap.

The expression on the face of the young widow changed. She glanced down for a mo-

ment at the little head in her lap, then bending down, she buried her face in the brown tresses, and drew her form close to her heart.

In a moment the young girl was pouring out her soul to her as if she had been her daughter.

The expression in Alice Lancaster's eyes was softer than it had been for a long time, for it was the light of self-sacrifice that shone in them.

"You have your happiness in your hands," she said tenderly.

Lois looked up with dissent in her eyes.

Mrs. Lancaster shook her head.

"No. He will never be in love with me again."

The girl gave a quick intaking of her breath, her hand clutching at her throat.

"Oh, Mrs. Lancaster!" She was thinking aloud rather than speaking. "I thought that you cared for him."

Alice Lancaster shook her head. She tried to meet frankly the other's eyes, but as they gazed deep into hers with an inquiry not to be put aside, hers failed and fell.

"No," she said, but it was with a gasp.

Lois's eyes opened wide, and her face changed.

"Oh!" she murmured, as the sense of what

she had done swept over her. She rose to her feet and, bending down, kissed Mrs. Lancaster tenderly. One might have thought she was the elder of the two.

Lois returned home in deep thought. She had surprised Mrs. Lancaster's secret, and the end was plain. She allowed herself no delusions. The dream that for a moment had shed its radiance on her was broken. Keith was in love with Mrs. Lancaster, and Alice loved him. She prayed that they might be happy—especially Keith. She was angry with herself that she had allowed herself to become so interested in him. She would forget him. This was easier said than done. But she could at least avoid seeing him. And having made her decision, she held to it firmly. She avoided him in every way possible.

The strain, however, had been too much for Lois, and her strength began to go. The doctor advised Mrs. Wentworth to send her home. "She is breaking down, and you will have her ill on your hands," he said. Lois, too, was pining to get away. She felt that she could not stand the city another week. And so, one day, she disappeared from town.

When Wickersham met Mrs. Lancaster after her talk with Lois, he was conscious of the

change in her. The old easy, indulgent attitude was gone; and in her eye, instead of the lazy, half-amused smile, was something very like scorn. Something had happened, he knew.

His thoughts flew to Keith, Norman, Rimmon, also to several ladies of his acquaintance. What had they told her? Could it be the fact that he had lost nearly everything—that he had spent Mrs. Wentworth's money? That he had written anonymous letters? Whatever it was he would brave it out. He had been in some hard places lately, and had won out by his nerve. He assumed an injured and a virtuous air, and no man could do it better.

"What has happened? You are so strange to me. Has some one been prejudicing you against me? Some one has slandered me," he said, with an air of virtue.

"No. No one." Mrs. Lancaster turned her rings with a little embarrassment. She was trying to muster the courage to speak plainly to him. He gave it to her.

"Oh, yes; some one has. I think I have a right to demand who it is. Is it that man Keith?"

"No." She glanced at him with a swift flash in her eye. "Mr. Keith has not mentioned your name to me since I came home."

Her tone fired him with jealousy.

"Well, who was it, then? He is not above it. He hates me enough to say anything. He has never got over our buying his old place, and has never lost an opportunity to malign me since."

She looked him in the face, for the first time, quite steadily.

"Let me tell you, Mr. Keith has never said a word against you to me—and that is much more than I can say for you; so you need not be maligning him now."

A faint flush stole into Wickersham's face.

"You appear to be championing his cause very warmly."

"Because he is a friend of mine and an honorable gentleman."

He gave a hard, bitter laugh.

"Women are innocent!"

"It is more than men are," she said, fired, as women always are, by a fleer at the sex.

"Who has been slandering me?" he demanded, angered suddenly by her retort. "I have stood in a relation to you which gives me a right to demand the name."

"What relation to me?—Where is your wife?"

His face whitened, and he drew in his breath

as if struck a blow,—a long breath,—but in a second he had recovered himself, and he burst into a laugh.

"So you have heard that old story—and believe it?" he said, with his eyes looking straight into hers. As she made no answer, he went on. "Now, as you have heard it, I will explain the whole thing to you. I have always wanted to do it; but—but—I hardly knew whether it were better to do it or leave it alone. I thought if you had heard it you would mention it to me—"

"I have done so now," she said coldly.

"I thought our relation—or, as you object to that word, our friendship—entitled me to that much from you."

"I never heard it till—till just now," she defended, rather shaken by his tone and air of candor.

"When?"

"Oh—very recently."

"Won't you tell me who told you?"

"No—o. Go on."

"Well, that woman—that poor girl—her name was—her name is—Phrony Tripper—or Trimmer. I think that was her name—she called herself Euphronia Tripper." He was trying with puckered brow to recall exactly.

"I suppose that is the woman you are referring to?" he said suddenly.

"It is. You have not had more than one, have you?"

He laughed, pleased to give the subject a lighter tone.

"Well, this poor creature I used to know in the South when I was a boy—when I first went down there, you know? She was the daughter of an old farmer at whose house we stayed. I used to talk to her. You know how a boy talks to a pretty girl whom he is thrown with in a lonesome old country place, far from any amusement." Her eyes showed that she knew, and he was satisfied and proceeded.

"But heavens! the idea of being in love with her! Why, she was the daughter of a farmer. Well, then I fell in with her afterwards—once or twice, to be accurate—when I went down there on business, and she was a pretty, vain country girl—"

"I used to know her," assented Mrs. Lancaster.

"You did!" His face fell.

"Yes; when I went there to a little Winter resort for my throat—when I was seventeen. She used to go to the school taught by Mr. Keith."

"She did? Oh, then you know her name? It was Tripper, wasn't it?"

She nodded.

"I thought it was. Well, she was quite pretty, you remember; and, as I say, I fell in with her again, and having been old friends—" He shifted in his seat a little as if embarrassed —"Why—oh, you know how it is. I began to talk nonsense to her to pass away the time,—told her she was pretty and all that,—and made her a few presents—and—" He paused and took a long breath. "I thought she was very queer. The first thing I knew, I found she was—out of her mind. Well, I stopped and soon came away, and, to my horror, she took it into her head that she was my wife. She followed me here. I had to go abroad, and I heard no more of her until not long ago, I heard she had gone completely crazy and was hunting me up as her husband. You know how such poor creatures are?" He paused, well satisfied with his recital, for first surprise and then a certain sympathy took the place of incredulity in Mrs. Lancaster's face.

"She is absolutely mad, poor thing, I understand," he sighed, with unmistakable sympathy in his voice.

"Yes," Mrs. Lancaster assented, her thoughts drifting away.

He watched her keenly, and next moment began again.

"I heard she had got hold of Mr. Rimmon's name and declares that he married us."

Mrs. Lancaster returned to the present, and he went on:

"I don't know how she got hold of it. I suppose his being the fashionable preacher, or his name being in the papers frequently, suggested the idea. But if you have any doubt on the subject, ask him."

Mrs. Lancaster looked assent.

"Here— Having heard the story, and thinking it might be as well to stop it at once, I wrote to Mr. Rimmon to give me a statement to set the matter at rest, and I have it in my pocket." He took from his pocket-book a letter and spread it before Mrs. Lancaster. It read:

"DEAR MR. WICKERSHAM: I am sorry you are being annoyed. I cannot imagine that you should need any such statement as you request. The records of marriages are kept in the proper office here. Any one who will take the trouble to inspect those records will see that I have never made any such report. This should be more than sufficient.

"I feel sure this will answer your purpose.

"Yours sincerely,

"W. H. RIMMON."

"I think that settles the matter," said Wickersham, with his eyes on her face.

"It would seem so," said Mrs. Lancaster, gravely.

As she spoke slowly, Wickersham put in one more nail.

"Of course, you know there must be a witness to a marriage," he said. "If there be such a witness, let K—let those who are engaged in defaming me produce him."

"No, no," said Mrs. Lancaster, quickly. "Mr. Rimmon's statement—I think I owe you an apology for what I said. Of course, it appeared incredible; but something occurred—I can't tell you—I don't want to tell you what—that shocked me very much, and I suppose I judged too hastily and harshly. You must forget what I said, and forgive me for my injustice."

"Certainly I will," he said earnestly.

The revulsion in her belief inclined her to be kinder toward him than she had been in a long time.

The change in her manner toward him made Wickersham's heart begin to beat. He leant over and took her hand.

"Won't you give me more than justice, Alice?" he began. "If you knew how long I

have waited—how I have hoped even against hope—how I have always loved you—" She was so taken aback by his declaration that for a moment she did not find words to reply, and he swept on: "—you would not be so cold —so cruel to me. I have always thought you the most beautiful—the most charming woman in New York."

She shook her head. "No, you have not."

"I have; I swear I have! Even when I have hung around—around other women, I have done so because I saw you were taken up with —some one else. I thought I might find some one else to supplant you, but never for one moment have I failed to acknowledge your superiority—"

"Oh, no; you have not. How can you dare to tell me that?" she smiled, recovering her self-possession.

"I have, Alice, ever since you were a girl—even when you were—were—when you were beyond me—I loved you more than ever—I—" Her face changed, and she recoiled from him.

"Don't," she said.

"I will." He seized her hand and held it tightly. "I loved you even then better than I ever loved in my life—better than your—than any one else did." Her face whitened.

"Stop!" she cried. "Not another word. I will not listen. Release my hand." She pulled it from him forcibly, and, as he began again, she, with a gesture, stopped him.

"No—no—no! It is impossible. I will not listen."

His face changed as he looked into her face. She rose from her seat and turned away from him, taking two or three steps up and down, trying to regain control of herself.

He waited and watched her, an angry light coming into his eyes. He misread her feelings. He had made love to married women before and had not been repulsed.

She turned to him now, and with level eyes looked into his.

"You never loved me in your life. I have had men in love with me, and know when they are; but you are not one of them."

"I was—I am—" he began, stepping closer to her; but she stopped him.

"Not for a minute," she went on, without heeding him. "And you had no right to say that to me."

"What?" he demanded.

"What you said. My husband loved me with all the strength of a noble, high-minded man,

and notwithstanding the difference in our ages, treated me as his equal; and I loved him—yes, loved him devotedly," she said, as she saw a spark come into his eyes.

"You love some one else now," he said coolly.

It might have been anger that brought the rush of color to her face. She turned and looked him full in the face.

"If I do, it is not you."

The arrow went home. His eyes snapped with anger.

"You took such lofty ground just now that I should hardly have supposed the attentions of Mr. Wentworth meant anything so serious. I thought that was mere friendship."

This time there was no doubt that the color meant anger.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, looking him once more full in the eyes.

"I refer to what the world says, especially as he himself is such a model of all the Christian virtues."

"What the world says? What do you mean?" she persisted, never taking her eyes from his face.

He simply shrugged his shoulders.

"So I assume Mr. Keith is the fortunate suitor for the remnant of your affections: Keith the immaculate—Keith the pure and pious gentleman who trades on his affections. I wish you good luck."

At his insolence Mrs. Lancaster's patience suddenly snapped.

"Go," she said, pointing to the door. "Go."

When Wickersham walked out into the street, his face was white and drawn, and a strange light was in his eyes. He had played one of his last cards, and had played it like a fool. Luck had gone against him, and he had lost his head. His heart—that heart that had never known remorse and rarely dismay—began to sink. Luck had been going against him now for a long time, so long that it had swept away his fortune and most of his credit. What was worse to him, he was conscious that he had lost his nerve. Where should he turn? Unless luck turned or he could get help he would go down. He canvassed the various means of escape. Man after man had fallen away from him. Every scheme had failed.

He attributed it all to Norman—to Norman and Keith. Norman had ruined him in New

York; Keith had blocked him and balked him in the South. But one resource remained to him. He would make one more supreme effort. Then, if he failed! He thought of a locked drawer in his desk, and a black pistol under the papers there. His cheek blanched at the thought, but his lips closed tight. He would not survive disgrace. His disgrace meant the known loss of his fortune. One thing he would do. Keith had escaped him, had succeeded, but Norman he could overthrow. Norman had been struck hard; he would now complete his ruin. With this mental tonic he straightened up and walked rapidly down the street.

That evening Wickersham was closeted for some time with a man who had of late come into especial notice as a strong and merciless financier—Mr. Kestrel.

Mr. Kestrel received him at first with a coldness which might have repelled a less determined man. He had no delusions about Wickersham; but Wickersham knew this, and unfolded to him, with plausible frankness, a scheme which had much reason in it. He had at the same time played on the older man's foibles with great astuteness, and had awakened one or two of his dormant animosities. He

knew that Mr. Kestrel had had a strong feeling against Norman for several years.

"You are one of the few men who do not have to fall down and worship the name of Wentworth," he said.

"Well, I rather think not," said Mr. Kestrel, with a glint in his eyes, as he recalled Norman Wentworth's scorn of him at the board-meeting years before, when Norman had defended Keith against him.

"—Or this new man, Keith, who is undertaking to teach New York finance?"

Mr. Kestrel gave a hard little laugh, which was more like a cough than an expression of mirth, but which meant that he was amused.

"Well, neither do I," said Wickersham. "To tell you frankly, I hate them both, though there is money, and big money, in this, as you can see for yourself from what I have said. This is my real reason for wanting you in it. If you jump in and hammer down those things, you will clean them out. I have the old patents to all the lands that Keith sold those people. They antedate the titles under which Rawson claims. If you can break up the deal now, we will go in and recover the lands from Rawson. Wentworth is so deep in that he'll never pull

through, and his friend Keith has staked everything on this one toss."

Old Kestrel's parchment face was inscrutable as he gazed at Wickersham and declared that he did not know about that. He did not believe in having animosities in business matters, as it marred one's judgment. But Wickersham knew enough to be sure that the seed he had planted would bear fruit, and that Kestrel would stake something on the chance.

In this he was not deceived. The next day Mr. Kestrel acceded to his plan.

For some days after that there appeared in a certain paper a series of attacks on various lines of property holdings, that was characterized by other papers as a "strong bearish movement." The same paper contained a vicious article about the attempt to unload worthless coal-lands on gullible Englishmen. Meantime Wickersham, foreseeing failure, acted independently.

The attack might not have amounted to a great deal but for one of those untimely accidents that sometimes overthrow all calculations. One of the keenest and oldest financiers in the city suddenly dropped dead, and a stampede started on the Stock Exchange. It was

stayed in a little while, but meantime a number of men had been hard hit, and among these was Norman Wentworth. The papers next day announced the names of those who had suffered, and much space was given in one of them to the decline of the old firm of Wentworth & Son, whose history was almost contemporary with that of New York.

By noon it was extensively rumored that Wentworth & Son would close their doors. The firm which had lasted for three generations, and whose name had been the synonym for honor and for philanthropy, which had stood as the type of the highest that can exist in commerce, would go down. Men spoke of it with a regret which did them honor—hard men who rarely expressed regret for the losses of another.

It was rumored, too, that Wickersham & Company must assign; but this caused little surprise and less regret. Aaron Wickersham had had friends, but his son had not succeeded to them.

Keith, having determined to talk to Alice Lancaster about Lois, was calling on the former a day or two after her interview with Wickersham. She was still somewhat disturbed over

it, and showed it in her manner so clearly that Keith asked what was the trouble.

It was nothing very much, she said. Only she had broken finally with a friend she had known a long time, and such things upset her.

Keith was sympathetic, and suddenly, to his surprise, she broke down and began to cry. He had never seen her weep before since she sat, as a girl, in the pine-woods and he lent her his handkerchief to dry her tears. Something in the association gave him a feeling of unwonted tenderness. She had not appeared to him so soft, so feminine, in a long time. He essayed to comfort her. He, too, had broken with an old friend, the friend of a lifetime, and he would never get over it.

"Mine was such a blow to me," she said, wiping her eyes; "such cruel things were said to me. I did not think any one but a woman would have said such biting things to a woman."

"It was Ferdy Wickersham, I know," said Keith, his eyes contracting; "but what on earth could he have said? What could he have dared to say to wound you so?"

"He said all the town was talking about me and Norman." She began to cry again. "Nor-

man, dear old Norman, who has been more like a brother to me than any one I have ever known, and whom I would give the world to bring back happiness to."

"He is a scoundrel!" exclaimed Keith. "I have stood all—more than I ever expected to stand from any man living; but if he is attacking women"—he was speaking to himself rather than to her—"I will unmask him. He is not worth your notice," he said kindly, addressing her again. "Women have been his prey ever since I knew him, when he was but a young boy." Mrs. Lancaster dried her eyes.

"You refer to the story that he had married that poor girl and abandoned her?"

"Yes—partly that. That is the worst thing I know of him."

"But that is not true. However cruel he is, that accusation is unfounded. I know that myself."

"How do you know it?" asked Keith, in surprise.

"He told me the whole story: explained the thing to my satisfaction. It was a poor crazy girl who claimed that he married her; said Mr. Rimmon had performed the ceremony. She was crazy. I saw Mr. Rimmon's letter denying the whole thing."

"Do you know his handwriting?" inquired Keith, grimly.

"Whose?"

"Well, that of both of them?"

She nodded, and Keith, taking out his pocket-book, opened it and took therefrom a slip of paper. "Look at that. I got that a few days ago from the witness who was present."

"Why, what is this?" She sprang up in her excitement. "It is incredible!" she said slowly. "Why, he told me the story with the utmost circumstantiality."

"He lied to you," said Keith, grimly. "And Rimmon lied. That is their handwriting. I have had it examined by the best expert in New York City. I had not intended to use that against him, but only to clear the character of that poor young creature whom he deceived and then abandoned; but as he is defaming her here, and is at his old trade of trying to deceive women, it is time he was shown up in his true colors."

She gave a shudder of horror, and wiped her right hand with her left. "Oh, to think that he dared!" She wiped her hand on her handkerchief.

At that moment a servant brought in a card.

As Mrs. Lancaster gazed at it, her eyes flashed and her lip curled.

"Say that Mrs. Lancaster begs to be excused."

"Yes, madam." The servant hesitated. "I think he heard you talking, madam."

"Say that Mrs. Lancaster begs to be excused," she said firmly.

The servant, with a bow, withdrew.

She handed the card to Keith. On it was the name of the Rev. William H. Rimmon.

Mr. Rimmon, as he stood in the hall, was in unusually good spirits, though slightly perturbed. He had determined to carry through a plan that he had long pondered over. He had decided to ask Mrs. Lancaster to become Mrs. Rimmon.

As Keith glanced toward the door, he caught Mr. Rimmon's eye. He was waiting on the threshold and rubbing his hands with eager expectancy. Just then the servant gave him the message. Keith saw his countenance fall and his face blanch. He turned, picked up his hat, and slipped out of the door, with a step that was almost a slink.

As Mr. Rimmon passed down the street he knew that he had reached a crisis in his life.

He went to see Wickersham, but that gentleman was in no mood for condolences. Everything had gone against him. He was facing utter ruin. Rimmon's upbraiding angered him.

"By the way, you are the very man I wanted to see," he said grimly. "I want you to sign a note for that twenty thousand I lost by you when you insisted on my holding that stock."

Rimmon's jaw fell. "That you held for me? Sign a note! Twenty-six thousand!"

"Yes. Don't pretend innocence—not on me. Save that for the pulpit. I know you," said the other, with a chilling laugh.

"But you were to carry that. That was a part of our agreement. Why, twenty thousand would take everything I have."

"Don't play that on me," said Wickersham, coldly. "It won't work. You can make it up when you get your widow."

Rimmon groaned helplessly.

"Come; there is the note. Sign."

Rimmon began to expostulate, and finally refused point-blank to sign. Wickersham gazed at him with amusement.

"You sign that, or I will serve suit on you in a half-hour, and we will see how the Rev. Mr. Rimmon stands when my lawyers are

through with him. You will believe in hell then, sure enough."

"You won't dare do it. Your marriage would come out. Mrs. Lancaster would—"

"She knows it," said Wickersham, calmly. And, as Rimmon looked sceptical, "I told her myself to spare you the trouble. Sign." He rose and touched a bell.

Rimmon, with a groan, signed the paper.

"You must have showed her my letter?"

"Of course, I did."

"But you promised me not to. I am ruined!"

"What have I to do with that? 'See thou to that,'" said Wickersham, with a bitter laugh.

Rimmon's face paled at the quotation. He, too, had betrayed his Lord.

"Now go." Wickersham pointed to the door.

Mr. Rimmon went home and tried to write a letter to Mrs. Lancaster, but he could not master his thoughts. That pen that usually flowed so glibly failed to obey him. He was in darkness. He saw himself dishonored, displaced. Wickersham was capable of anything. He did not know where to turn. He thought of his brother clergymen. He knew many good men who spent their lives helping others. But something deterred him from applying to them

now. To some he had been indifferent, others he had known only socially. Yet others had withdrawn themselves from him more and more of late. He had attributed it to their envy or their folly. He suddenly thought of old Dr. Templeton. He had always ignored that old man as a sort of crack-brained creature who had not been able to keep up with the world, and had been left stranded, doing the work that properly belonged to the unsuccessful. Curiously enough, he was the one to whom the unhappy man now turned. Besides, he was a friend of Mrs. Lancaster.

A half-hour later the Rev. Mr. Rimmon was in Dr. Templeton's simple study, and was finding a singular sense of relief in pouring out his troubles to the old clergyman. He told him something of his unhappy situation—not all, it is true, but enough to enable the other to see how grave it was, as much from what he inferred as from what Rimmon explained. He even began to hope again. If the Doctor would undertake to straighten out the complications he might yet pull through. To his dismay, this phase of the matter did not appear to present itself to the old man's mind. It was the sin that he had committed that had touched him.

"Let us carry it where only we can find re-

lief," he said. "Let us take it to the Throne of Grace, where we can lay all our burdens"; and before Rimmon knew it he was on his knees, praying for him as if he had been a very outcast.

When the Rev. Mr. Rimmon came out of the shabby little study, though he had not gotten the relief he had sought, he, somehow, felt a little comforted, while at the same time he felt humble. He had one of those brief intervals of feeling that, perhaps, there was, after all, something that that old man had found which he had missed, and he determined to find it. But Mr. Rimmon had wandered far out of the way. He had had a glimpse of the pearl, but the price was great, and he had not been able to pay it all.

Wickersham discounted the note; but the amount was only a bagatelle to him: a bucket-shop had swallowed it within an hour. He had lost his instinct. It was only the love of gambling that remained.

Only one chance appeared to remain for him. He had made up with Louise Wentworth after a fashion. He must get hold of her in some way. He might obtain more money from her.

The method he selected was a desperate one; but he was a desperate man.

After long pondering, he sat down and wrote her a note, asking her "to meet some friends of his, a Count and Countess Torelli, at supper" next evening.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE RUN ON THE BANK

IT was the day after the events just recorded that Keith's deal was concluded. The attack on him and the attempt made by Wickersham and Kestrel to break up his deal had failed, and the deeds and money were passed.

Keith was on his way back to his office from his final interview with the representative of the syndicate that had bought the properties. He was conscious of a curious sensation, partly of exhilaration, partly of almost awe, as he walked through the crowded streets, where every one was bent on the same quest: gold. At last he had won. He was rich. He wondered, as he walked along, if any of the men he shouldered were as rich as he. Norman and Ferdy Wickersham recurred to him. Both had been much wealthier; but Wickersham, he knew, was in straits, and Norman was in some

trouble. He was unfeignedly glad about Wickersham; but the recollection of Norman clouded his face.

It was with a pang that he recalled Norman's recent conduct to him—a pang that one who had always been his friend should have changed so; but that was the way of the world. This reflection, however, was not consoling.

He reached his office and seated himself at his desk, to take another look at his papers. Before he opened them he rose and locked the door, and opening a large envelope, spread the papers out on the desk before him.

He thought of his father. He must write and tell him of his success. Then he thought of his old home. He remembered his resolution to restore it and make it what it used to be. But how much he could do with the money it would take to fit up the old place in the manner he had contemplated! By investing it judiciously he could double it.

Suddenly there was a step outside and a knock at his door, followed by voices in the outer office. Keith rose, and putting his papers back in his pocket, opened the door. For a second he had a mingled sensation of pleasure and surprise. His father stood there, his bag

clutched in his hand. He looked tired, and had aged some since Keith saw him last; but his face wore the old smile that always illumined it when it rested on his son.

Keith greeted him warmly and drew him inside. "I was just thinking of you, sir."

"You would not come to see me, so I have come to see you. I have heard from you so rarely that I was afraid you were sick." His eyes rested fondly on Gordon's face.

"No; I have been so busy; that is all. Well, sir, I have won." His eyes were sparkling.

The old gentleman's face lit up.

"You have? Found Phrony, have you? I am so glad. It will give old Rawson a new lease of life. I saw him after he got back. He has failed a good deal lately."

"No, sir. I have found her, too; but I mean I have won out at last."

"Ah, you have won her? I congratulate you. I hope she will make you happy."

Keith laughed.

"I don't mean that. I mean I have sold my lands at last. I closed this morning with the Englishmen, and received the money."

The General smiled.

"Ah, you have, have you? That's very good. I am glad for old Adam Rawson's sake."

"I was afraid he would die before the deeds passed," said Keith. "But see, here are the drafts to my order." He spread them out. "This one is my commission. And I have the same amount of common stock."

His father made no comment on this, but presently said: "You will have enough to restore the old place a little."

"How much would it cost to fix up the place as you think it ought to be fixed up?"

"Oh, some thousands of dollars. You see, the house is much out of repair, and the quarters ought really all to be rebuilt. Old Charlotte's house I have kept in repair, and Richard now sleeps in the house, as he has gotten so rheumatic. I should think five or six thousand dollars might do it."

"I can certainly spare that much," said Keith, laughing.

"How is Norman?" asked the General.

Keith was conscious of a feeling of discontent. His countenance fell.

"Why, I don't know. I don't see much of him these days."

"Ah! I want to go to see him."

"The fact is, we have—er—had—. There has been an unfortunate misunderstanding between us. No one regrets it more than I; but I think I can say it was not at all my fault, and I have done all and more than was required of me."

"Ah, I am very sorry for that. It's a pity—a pity!" said the old General. "What was it about?"

"Well, I don't care to talk about it, sir. But I can assure you, I was not in the least to blame. It was caused mainly, I believe, by that fellow, Wickersham."

"He 's a scoundrel!" said the General, with sudden vehemence.

"He is, sir!"

"I will go and see Norman. I see by the papers he is in some trouble."

"I fear he is, sir. His bank has been declining."

"Perhaps you can help him?" His face lit up. "You remember, he once wrote you—a long time ago?"

"I remember; I have repaid that," said Keith, quickly. "He has treated me very badly." He gave a brief account of the trouble between them.

The old General leant back and looked at his son intently. His face was very grave and showed that he was reflecting deeply.

"Gordon," he said presently, "the Devil is standing very close to you. A real misunderstanding should always be cleared up. You must go to him."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked his son, in some confusion.

"You are at the parting of the ways. A gentleman cannot hesitate. Such a debt never can be paid by a gentleman," he said calmly. "You must help him, even if you cannot restore the old place. Elphinstone has gone for a debt before." He rose as if there was nothing more to be said. "Well, I will go and wait for you at your rooms." He walked out.

Keith sat and reflected. How different he was from his father! How different from what he had been years ago! Then he had had an affection for the old home and all that it represented. He had worked with the idea of winning it back some day. It had been an inspiration to him. But now it was wealth that he had begun to seek.

It came to him clearly how much he had changed. The process all lay before him. It

had grown with his success, and had kept pace with it in an almost steady ratio since he had set success before him as a goal. He was angry with himself to find that he was thinking now of success merely as Wealth. Once he had thought of Honor and Achievement, even of Duty. He remembered when he had not hesitated to descend into what appeared the very jaws of death, because it seemed to him his duty. He wondered if he would do the same now.

He felt that this was a practical view which he was now taking of life. He was now a practical man; yes, practical like old Kestrel, said his better self. He felt that he was not as much of a gentleman as he used to be. He was further from his father; further from what Norman was. This again brought Norman to his mind. If the rumors which he had heard were true, Norman was now in a tight place.

As his father had said, perhaps he might be able to help him. But why should he do it? If Norman had helped him in the past, had he not already paid him back? And had not Norman treated him badly of late without the least cause —met his advances with a rebuff? No; he would show him that he was not to be treated

so. He still had a small account in Norman's bank, which he had not drawn out because he had not wished to let Norman see that he thought enough of his coldness to make any change; but he would put his money now into old Creamer's bank. After looking at his drafts again, he unlocked his door and went out on the street.

There was more commotion on the street than he had seen in some days. Men were hurrying at a quicker pace than the rapid gait which was always noticeable in that thoroughfare. Groups occasionally formed and, after a word or two, dispersed. Newsboys were crying extras and announcing some important news in an unintelligible jargon. Messengers were dashing about, rushing in and out of the big buildings. Something unusual was evidently going on. As Keith, on his way to the bank of which Mr. Creamer was president, passed the mouth of the street in which Norman's office was situated, he looked down and saw quite a crowd assembled. The street was full. He passed on, however, and went into the big building, on the first floor of which Creamer's bank had its offices. He walked through to the rear of the office, to the door of Mr. Creamer's private

office, and casually asked the nearest clerk for Mr. Creamer. The young man said he was engaged. Keith, however, walked up to the door, and was about to knock, when, at a word spoken by his informant, another clerk came hastily forward and said that Mr. Creamer was very busily engaged and could see no one.

"Well, he will see me," said Keith, feeling suddenly the courage that the possession of over a quarter of a million dollars gave, and he boldly knocked on the door, and, without waiting to be invited in, opened it.

Mr. Creamer was sitting at his desk, and two or three other men, one of whom Keith had seen before, were seated in front of him in close conference. They stared at the intruder.

"Mr. Keith." Mr. Creamer's tone conveyed not the least feeling, gave no idea either of welcome or surprise.

"Excuse me for interrupting you for a moment," said Keith. "I want to open an account here. I have a draft on London, which I should like to deposit and have you collect for me."

The effect was immediate; indeed, one might almost say magical. The atmosphere of the room as suddenly changed as if May should be dropped into the lap of December. The old

banker's face relaxed. He touched a bell under the lid of his desk, and at the same moment pushed back his chair.

"Gentlemen, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Keith." He presented Keith in turn to each of his companions, who greeted him with that degree of mingled reserve and civility which is due to a man who has placed a paper capable of effecting such a marked change in the hands of the most self-contained banker in Bankers' Row.

A tap at the door announced an answer to the bell, and the next moment a clerk came in.

"Ask Mr. Penwell to come here," said Mr. Creamer. "Mr. Penwell is the head of our foreign department," he added in gracious explanation to Keith.

"Mr. Keith, gentlemen, is largely interested in some of those Southern mining properties that you have heard me speak of, and has just put through a very fine deal with an English syndicate."

The door opened, and a cool-looking, slender man of fifty-odd, with a thin gray face, thin gray hair very smoothly brushed, and keen gray eyes, entered. He was introduced to Mr. Keith. After Mr. Creamer had stated the pur-

pose of Keith's visit and had placed the drafts in Mr. Penwell's hands, the latter stated, as an interesting item just off the ticker, that he understood Wentworth was in trouble. Some one had just come and said that there was a run on his bank.

"Those attacks on him in the newspapers must have hurt him considerably," observed one of the visitors.

"Yes, he has been a good deal hurt," said Mr. Creamer. "We are all right, Penwell?" He glanced at his subordinate.

Mr. Penwell nodded with deep satisfaction.

"So are we," said one of the visitors. "This is the end of Wentworth & Son. He will go down."

"He has been going down for some time. Wife too extravagant."

This appeared to be the general opinion. But Keith scarcely heard the speakers. He stood in a maze.

The announcement of Norman's trouble had come to him like a thunder-clap. And he was standing now as in a dream. Could it be possible that Norman was going to fail? And if he failed, would this be all it meant to these men who had known him always?

The vision of an old gentleman sitting in his home, which he had lost, came back to him across the years.

"That young man is a gentleman," he heard him say. "It takes a gentleman to write such a letter to a friend in misfortune. Write to him and say we will never forget his kindness." He heard the same old gentleman say, after years of poverty, "You must pay your debt though I give up Elphinstone."

Was he not now forgetting Norman's kindness? But was it not too late? Could he save him? Would he not simply be throwing away his money to offer it to him? Suddenly again, he seemed to hear his father's voice:

"The Devil is standing close behind you. You are at the parting of the ways. A gentleman cannot hesitate."

"Mr. Creamer," he said suddenly, "why don't Norman Wentworth's friends come to his rescue and help him out of his difficulties?"

The question might have come from the sky, it was so unexpected. It evidently caught the others unprepared with an answer. They simply smiled vaguely. Mr. Creamer said presently, rubbing his chin:

"Why, I don't suppose they know the extent of his difficulties."

"And I guess he has no collateral to offer?" said another.

"Collateral! No; everything he has is pledged."

"But I mean, why don't they lend him money without collateral, if necessary, to tide him over his trouble? He is a man of probity. He has lived here all his life. He must have many friends able to help him. They know that if he had time to realize on his properties he would probably pull through."

With one accord the other occupants of the room turned and looked at Keith.

"Did you say you had made a fortune in mining deals?" asked one of the gentlemen across the table, gazing at Keith through his gold-rimmed glasses with a wintry little smile.

"No, I did not. Whatever was said on that subject Mr. Creamer said."

"Oh! That's so. He did. Well, you are the sort of a man we want about here."

This remark was received with some amusement by the others; but Keith passed it by, and turned to Mr. Creamer.

"Mr. Creamer, how much money will you give me on this draft? This is mine. The other I wish to deposit here."

"Why, I don't know just what the exchange would be. What is the exchange on this, Penwell?"

"Will you cash this draft for me?" asked Keith.

"Certainly."

"Well, will you do me a further favor? It might make very little difference if I were to make a deposit in Norman's bank; but if you were to make such a deposit there, it would probably reassure people, and the run might be stopped. I have known of one or two instances."

Mr. Creamer agreed, and the result was a sort of reaction in Norman's favor, in sentiment if not in action. It was arranged that Keith should go and make a deposit, and that Mr. Creamer should send a man to make a further one and offer Wentworth aid.

When Gordon Keith reached the block on which stood Norman's bank, the street was already filled with a dense crowd, pushing, growling, complaining, swearing, threatening. It was eivdently a serious affair, and Keith, trying to make his way through the mob, heard many things about Norman which he never could have believed it would have been possible

to hear. The crowd was in an ugly mood, and was growing uglier. A number of policemen were trying to keep the people in line so that they could take their turn. Keith found it impossible to make his way to the front. His explanation that he wished to make a deposit was greeted with shouts of derision.

"Stand back there, young man. We've heard that before; you can't work that on us. We would all like to make deposits—somewhere else."

"Except them what's already made 'em," some one added, at which there was a laugh.

Keith applied to a policeman with hardly more success, until he opened the satchel he carried, and mentioned the name of the banker who was to follow him. On this the officer called another, and after a hurried word or two began to force their way through the crowd, with Keith between them. By dint of commanding, pushing, and explaining, they at length reached the entrance to the bank, and finally made their way, hot and perspiring, to the counter. A clerk was at work at every window counting out money as fast as checks were presented.

Just before Keith reached the counter, on

glancing through an open door, he saw Norman sitting at his desk, white and grim. His burning eyes seemed deeper than ever. He glanced up, and Keith thought he caught his gaze on him, but he was not sure, for he looked away so quickly. The next moment he walked around inside the counter and spoke to a clerk, who opened a ledger and gave him a memorandum. Then he came forward and spoke to a teller at the receiving window.

"Do you know that man with the two policemen? That is Mr. Gordon Keith. Here is his balance; pay it to him as soon as he reaches the window."

The teller, bending forward, gazed earnestly out of the small grated window over the heads of those nearest him. Keith met his gaze, and the teller nodded. Norman turned away without looking, and seated himself on a chair in the rear of the bank.

When Keith reached the window, the white-faced teller said immediately:

"Your balance, Mr. Keith, is so much; you have a check?" He extended his hand to take it.

"No," said Keith; "I have not come to draw out any money. I have come to make a deposit."

The teller was so much astonished that he simply ejaculated:

"Sir—?"

"I wish to make a deposit," said Keith, raising his voice a little, and speaking with great distinctness.

His voice had the quality of carrying, and a silence settled on the crowd,—one of those silences that sometimes fall, even on a mob, when the wholly unexpected happens,—so that every word that was spoken was heard distinctly.

"Ah—we are not taking deposits to-day," said the astonished teller, doubtfully.

Keith smiled.

"Well, I suppose there is no objection to doing so? I have an account in this bank, and I wish to add to it. I am not afraid of it."

The teller gazed at him in blank amazement; he evidently thought that Keith was a little mad. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but said nothing from sheer astonishment.

"I have confidence enough in this bank," pursued Keith, "to put my money here, and here I propose to put it, and I am not the only one; there will be others here in a little while."

"I shall—really, I shall have to ask Mr. Wentworth," faltered the clerk.

"Mr. Wentworth has nothing to do with it," said Keith, positively, and to close the discussion, he lifted his satchel through the window, and, turning it upside down, emptied before the astonished teller a pile of bills which made him gasp. "Enter that to my credit," said Keith.

"How much is it?"

The sum that Keith mentioned made him gasp yet more. It was up in the hundreds of thousands.

"There will be more here in a little while." He turned his head and glanced toward the door. "Ah, here comes some one now," he said, as he recognized one of the men whom he had recently left at the council board, who was then pushing his way forward, under the guidance of several policemen.

The amount deposited by the banker was much larger than Keith had expected, and a few well-timed words to those about him had a marked effect upon the depositors. He said their apprehension was simply absurd. They, of course, had the right to draw out their money, if they wished it, and they would get it, but he advised them to go home and wait to do so until the crowd dispersed. The bank was perfectly sound, and they could not break it unless they could also break its friends.

A few of the struggling depositors dropped out of line, some of the others saying that, as they had waited so long, they guessed they would get their money now.

The advice given, perhaps, had an added effect, as at that moment a shriek arose from a woman near the door, who declared that her pocket had been picked of the money she had just drawn.

The arrival of the new depositors, and the spreading through the crowd of the information that they represented several of the strongest banks in the city, quieted the apprehensions of the depositors, and a considerable number of them abandoned the idea of drawing out their money and went off. Though many of them remained, it was evident that the dangerous run had subsided. A notice was posted on the front door of the bank that the bank would remain open until eight o'clock and would be open the following morning at eight, which had something to do with allaying the excitement of the depositors.

That afternoon Keith went back to the bank. Though depositors were still drawing out their money, the scene outside was very different from that which he had witnessed earlier in

the day. Keith asked for Mr. Wentworth, and was shown to his room. When Keith entered, Norman was sitting at his desk figuring busily. Keith closed the door behind him and waited. The lines were deep on Norman's face; but the hunted look it had borne in the morning had passed away, and grim resolution had taken its place. When at length he glanced up, his already white face grew yet whiter. The next second a flush sprang to his cheeks; he pushed back his chair and rose, and, taking one step forward, stretched out his hand.

"Keith!"

Keith took his hand with a grip that drove the blood from the ends of Norman's fingers.

"Norman!"

Norman drew a chair close to his desk, and Keith sat down. Norman sank into his, looked down on the floor for a second, then, raising his eyes, looked full into Keith's eyes.

"Keith—?" His voice failed him; he glanced away, reached over, and took up a paper lying near, and the next instant leant forward, and folding his arms on the desk, dropped his head on them, shaken with emotion.

Keith rose from his chair, and bending over

him, laid his hand on his head, as he might have done to a younger brother.

"Don't, Norman," he said helplessly; "it is all right." He moved his hand down Norman's arm with a touch as caressing as if he had been a little child, but all he said was: "Don't, Norman; it is all right."

Suddenly Norman sat up.

"It is all wrong!" he said bitterly. "I have been a fool. I had no right—. But I was mad! I have wrecked my life. But I was insane. I was deceived. I do not know even now how it happened. I ought to have known, but—I learned only just now. I can never explain. I ask your pardon humbly."

Keith leant forward and laid his hand upon him affectionately.

"There, there! You owe me no apology, and I ask no explanation; it was all a great mistake."

"Yes, and all my fault. She was not to blame; it was my folly. I drove her to—desperation."

"I want to ask just one thing. Was it Ferdy Wickersham who made you believe I had deceived you?" asked Keith, standing straight above him.

"In part—mainly. But I was mad." He drew his hand across his forehead, sat back in his chair, and, with eyes averted, sighed deeply. His thoughts were evidently far from Keith. Keith's eyes rested on him, and his face paled a little with growing resolution.

"One question, Norman. Pardon me for asking it. My only reason is that I would give my life, a worthless life you once saved, to see you as you once were. I know more than you think I know. You love her still? I know you must."

Norman turned his eyes and let them rest on Keith's face. They were filled with anguish.

"Better than my life. I adore her."

Keith drew in his breath with a long sigh of relief and of content.

"Oh, I have no hope," Norman went on despairingly. "I gave her every right to doubt it. I killed her love. I do not blame her. It was all my fault. I know it now, when it is too late."

"It is not too late."

Norman shook his head, without even looking at Keith.

"Too late," he said, speaking to himself.

Keith rose to his feet.

"It is not too late," he declared, with a sudden ring in his voice; "she loves you."

Norman shook his head.

"She hates me; I deserve it."

"In her heart she adores you," said Keith, in a tone of conviction.

Norman turned away with a half-bitter laugh.

"You don't know."

"I do know, and you will know it, too. How long shall you be here?"

"I shall spend the night here," said Norman. "I must be ready for whatever may happen to-morrow morning.—I have not thanked you yet." He extended his hand to Keith. "You stemmed the tide for me to-day. I know what it must have cost you. I cannot regret it, and I know you never will; and I beg you to believe that, though I go down to-morrow, I shall never forget it, and if God spares me, I will repay you."

Keith's eyes rested on him calmly.

"You paid me long ago, Norman. I was paying a debt to-day, or trying to pay one, in a small way. It was not I who made that deposit to-day, but a better man and a finer gentleman than I can ever hope to be—my father. It was he who inspired me to do that; he paid that debt."

From what Keith had heard, he felt that he was justified in going to see Mrs. Wentworth. Possibly, it was not too late; possibly, he might be able to do something to clear away the misapprehension under which she labored, and to make up the trouble between her and Norman. Norman still loved her dearly, and Keith believed that she cared for him. Lois Huntington always declared that she did, and she could not have been deceived.

That she had been foolish Keith knew; that she had been wicked he did not believe. She was self-willed, vain, extravagant; but deep under her cold exterior burned fires of which she had once or twice given him a glimpse; and he believed that her deepest feeling was ever for Norman.

When he reached Mrs. Wentworth's house he was fortunate enough to find her at home. He was shown into the drawing-room.

When Mrs. Wentworth entered the room, Keith was conscious of a change in her since he had seen her last. She, too, had heard the clangor of the evil tongues that had connected their names. She greeted him with cordial words, but her manner was constrained, and her expression was almost suspicious.

She changed, however, under Keith's imperturbable and unfeigned friendliness, and suddenly asked him if he had seen Norman. For the first time real interest spoke in her voice and shone in her face. Keith said he had seen him.

"I have come to see if I could not help you. Perhaps, I may be able to do something to set things right."

"No—it is too late. Things have gone too far. We have just drifted—drifted—!" She flung up her hands and tossed them apart with a gesture of despair. "Drifted!" she repeated. She put her handkerchief to her eyes.

Keith watched her in silence for a moment, and then rising, he seated himself beside her.

"Come—this is all wrong—all wrong!" He caught her by the wrist and firmly took her hand down from her eyes, much as an older brother might have done. "I want to talk to you. Perhaps, I can help you—I may have been sent here for the purpose—who knows? At least, I want to help you. Now tell me." He looked into her face with grave, kind eyes. "You do not care for Ferdy Wickersham? That would be impossible."

"No, of course not,—except as a friend,—

and Norman liked another woman—your friend!" Her eyes flashed a sudden flame.

"Never! never!" repeated Keith, after a pause. "Norman is not that sort."

His absolute certainty daunted her.

"He did. I have reason to think—" she began. But Keith put her down.

"Never! I would stake my salvation on it."

"He is going to get a—try to get a divorce. He is willing to blacken my name."

"What! Never."

"But you do not know the reasons I have for saying so," she protested. "If I could tell you—"

"No, and I do not care. Doubt your own senses rather than believe that. Ferdy Wickersham is your authority for that."

"No, he is not—not my only authority. You are all so hard on Ferdy. He is a good friend of mine."

"He is not," asserted Keith. "He is your worst enemy—your very worst. He is incapable of being a friend."

"What have you against him?" she demanded. "I know you and he don't like each other, but—"

"Well, for one thing, he deceived a poor girl, and then abandoned her—and—"

"Perhaps, your information is incorrect You know how easy it is to get up a slander, and such women are—not to be believed. They always pretend that they have been deceived."

"She was not one of 'such women,'" said Keith, calmly. "She was a perfectly respectable woman, and the granddaughter of an old friend of mine."

"Well, perhaps. you may have been misinformed?"

"No; I have the evidence that Wickersham married her—and—"

"Oh, come now—that is absurd! Ferdy married! Why, Ferdy never cared enough for any one to marry her—unless she had money. He has paid attention to a rich woman, but— You must not strain my credulity too far. I really thought you had something to show against him. Of course, I know he is not a saint,—in fact, very far from it,—but he does not pretend to be. But, at least, he is not a hypocrite."

"He is a hypocrite and a scoundrel," declared Keith, firmly. "He is married, and his wife is living now. He abandoned her, and she is insane. I know her."

"You know her! Ferdy married!" She paused in wonder. His certainty carried conviction with it.

"I have his marriage certificate."

"You have?" A sort of amaze passed over her face.

He took out the paper and gave it to her. She gazed at it with staring eyes. "That is his hand." She rose with a blank face, and walked to the window; then, after a moment, came back and sat down. She had the expression of a person lost. "Tell me about it."

Keith told her. He also told her of Norman's losses.

Again that look of amazement crossed her face; her eyes became almost blank.

"Norman's fortune impaired! I cannot understand it—*he* told me— Oh, there must be some mistake!" she broke out vehemently. "You are deceiving me. No! I don't mean that, of course,—I know you would not,—but you have been deceived yourself." Her face was a sudden white.

Keith shook his head. "No."

"Why, look here. He cannot be hard up. He has kept up my allowance and met every demand—almost every demand—I have made on him." She was grasping at straws.

"And Ferdy Wickersham has spent it in Wall Street."

"What! No, he has not! There, at least, you do him an injustice. What he has got from me he has invested securely. I have all the papers—at least, some of them."

"How has he invested it?"

"Partly in a mine called the 'Great Gun Mine,' in New Leeds. Partly in Colorado.—I can help Norman with it." Her face brightened as the thought came to her.

Keith shook his head.

"The Great Gun Mine is a fraud—at least, it is worthless, not worth five cents on the dollar of what has been put in it. It was flooded years ago. Wickersham has used it as a mask for his gambling operations in Wall Street, but has not put a dollar into it for years; and now he does not even own it. His creditors have it."

Her face turned perfectly white.

A look, partly of pity for her, partly of scorn for Wickersham, crossed Keith's face. He rose and strode up and down the room in perplexity.

"He is a common thief," he said sternly—"beneath contempt!"

His conviction suddenly extended to her.

When he looked at her, she showed in her face that she believed him. Her last prop had fallen. The calamity had made her quiet.

"What shall I do?" she asked hopelessly.

"You must tell Norman."

"Oh!"

"Make a clean breast of it."

"You do not know Norman! How can I? He would despise me so! You do not know how proud he is. He—!" Words failed her, and she stared at Keith helplessly.

"If I do not know Norman, I know no one on earth. Go to him and tell him everything. It will be the happiest day of his life—your salvation and his."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

She relapsed into thought, and Keith waited.

"I was to see Fer—Mr. Wickersham tonight," she began presently. "He asked me to supper to meet some friends—the Count and Countess Torelli."

Keith smiled. A fine scorn came into his eyes.

"Where does he give the dinner? At what hour?"

She named the place—a fashionable restau-

rant up-town. The time was still several hours away.

"You must go to Norman."

She sat in deep reflection.

"It is your only chance—your only hope. Give me authority to act for you, and go to him. He needs you."

"If I thought he would forgive me?" she said in a low tone.

"He will. I have just come from him. Write me the authority and go at once."

A light appeared to dawn in her face.

She rose suddenly.

"What shall I write?"

"Write simply that I have full authority to act for you—and that you have gone to Norman."

She walked into the next room, and seating herself at an escritoire, she wrote for a short time. When she handed the paper to Keith it contained just what he had requested: a simple statement to F. C. Wickersham that Mr. Keith had full authority to represent her and act for her as he deemed best.

"Will that do?" she asked.

"I think so," said Keith. "Now go. Norman is waiting."

CHAPTER XXXIII

RECONCILIATION

FOR some time after Keith left her Mrs. Wentworth sat absolutely motionless, her eyes half closed, her lips drawn tight, in deep reflection. Presently she changed her seat and ensconced herself in the corner of a divan, leaning her head on her hand; but her expression did not change. Her mind was evidently working in the same channel. A tumult raged within her breast, but her face was set sphinx-like, inscrutable. Just then there was a scurry up-stairs; a boy's voice was heard shouting:

"See here, what papa sent us."

There was an answering shout, and then an uproar of childish delight. A sudden change swept over her. Light appeared to break upon her. Something like courage came into her face, not unmingled with tenderness, softening it and dispelling the gloom which had clouded

it. She rose suddenly and walked with a swift, decisive step out of the room and up the richly carpeted stairs. To a maid on the upper floor she said hurriedly: "Tell Fenderson to order the brougham—at once," and passed into her chamber.

Closing the door, she locked it. She opened a safe built in the wall; a package of letters fell out into the room. A spasm almost of loathing crossed her face. She picked up the letters and began to tear them up with almost violence, throwing the fragments into the grate as though they soiled her hands. Going back to the safe, she took out box after box of jewelry, opening them to glance in and see that the jewels were there. Yes, they were there: a pearl necklace; bracelets which had been the wonder of her set, and which her pretended friend and admirer had once said were worth as much as her home. She put them all into a bag, together with several large envelopes containing papers.

Then she went to a dress-closet, and began to search through it, choosing, finally, a simple, dark street dress, by no means one of the newest. A gorgeous robe, which had been laid out for her to wear, she picked up and flung on the

floor with sudden loathing. It was the gown she had intended to wear that night.

A tap at the door, and the maid's mild voice announced the carriage; and a few minutes later Mrs. Wentworth descended the stairs.

"Tell Mademoiselle Clarisse that Mr. Wentworth will be here this evening to see the children."

"Yes, madam." The maid's quiet voice was too well trained to express the slightest surprise, but as soon as the outer door had closed on her mistress, and she had heard the carriage drive away, she rushed down to the lower storey to convey the astounding intelligence, and to gossip over it for half an hour before she deemed it necessary to give the message to the governess who had succeeded Lois when the latter went home.

It was just eight o'clock that evening when the carriage drove up to the door of Norman Wentworth's bank, and a lady enveloped in a long wrap, her dark veil pulled down over her face, sprang out and ran up the steps. The crowd had long ago dispersed, though now and then a few timid depositors still made their way into the bank, to be on the safe side.

The intervention of the banks and the loans

they had made that afternoon had stayed the run and saved the bank from closing; but Norman Wentworth knew that if he was not ruined, his bank had received a shock from which it would not recover in a long time, and his fortune was crippled, he feared, almost beyond repair. The tired clerks looked up as the lady entered the bank, and, with glances at the clock, muttered a few words to each other about her right to draw money after the closing-hour had passed. When, however, she walked past their windows and went straight to Mr. Wentworth's door, their interest increased.

Norman, with his books before him, was sitting back in his chair, his head leaning back and resting in his clasped hands, deep in thought upon the gloom of the present and the perplexities of the future, when there was a tap at the door.

With some impatience he called to the person to enter.

The door opened, and Norman could scarcely believe his senses. For a second he did not even sit forward. He did not stir; he simply remained sitting back in his chair, his face turned to the door, his eyes resting on the figure before him in vague amazement. The next sec-

ond, with a half-cry, his wife was on her knees beside him, her arms about him, her form shaken with sobs. He sat forward slowly, and his arm rested on her shoulders.

"There! don't cry," he said slowly; "it might be worse."

But all she said was:

"Oh, Norman! Norman!"

He tried to raise her, with grave words to calm her; but she resisted, and clung to him closer.

"It is not so bad; it might be worse," he repeated.

She rose suddenly to her feet and flung back her veil.

"Can you forgive me? I have come to beg your forgiveness on my knees. I have been mad—mad. I was deceived. No! I will not say that—I was crazy—a fool! But I loved you always, you only. You will forgive me? Say you will."

"There, there! Of course I will—I do. I have been to blame quite as much—more than you. I was a fool."

"Oh, no, no! You shall not say that; but you will believe that I loved you—you only—always! You will believe this? I was mad."

He raised her up gently, and with earnest words reassured her, blaming himself for his harshness and folly.

She suddenly opened her bag and emptied the contents out on his desk.

"There! I have brought you these."

Her husband gazed in silent astonishment.

"I don't understand."

"They are for you," she said—"for us. To pay *our* debts. To help you." She pulled off her glove and began to take off her diamond rings.

"They will not go a great way," said Norman, with a smile of indulgence.

"Well, as far as they will go they shall go. Do you think I will keep anything I have when you are in trouble—when your good name is at stake? The house—everything shall go. It is all my fault. I have been a wicked, silly fool; but I did not know—I ought to have known; but I did not. I do not see how I could have been so blind and selfish."

"Oh, don't blame yourself. I have not blamed you," said Norman, soothingly. "Of course, you did not know. How could you? Women are not expected to know about those things."

"Yes, they are," insisted Mrs. Wentworth. "If I had not been such a fool I might have seen. It is all plain to me now. Your harassment—my folly—it came to me like a stroke of lightning."

Norman's eyes were on her with a strange inquiring look in them.

"How did you hear?" he asked.

"Mr. Keith—he came to me and told me."

"I wish he had not done it. I mean, I did not want you troubled. You were not to blame. You were deceived."

"Oh, don't say that! I shall never cease to thank him. He tore the veil away, and I saw what a heartless, vain, silly fool I have been." Norman put his hand on her soothingly. "But I have never forgotten that I was your wife, nor ceased to love you," she went on vehemently.

"I believe it."

"I have come to confess everything to you—all my folly—all my extravagance—my insane folly. But what I said just now is true: I have never forgotten that I was your wife."

Norman, with his arm supporting her, reassured her with comforting words, and, sustained by his confidence, she told him of her folly in trusting Ferdy Wickersham: of her giving him her money—of everything.

"Can you forgive me?" she asked after her shamefaced recital.

"I will never think of that again," said Norman, "and if I do, it will be with gratitude that they have played their part in doing away with the one great sorrow of my life and bringing back the happiness of my youth, the one great blessing that life holds for me."

"I have come to take you home," she said; "to ask you to come back, if you will but forgive me." She spoke humbly.

Norman's face gave answer even before he could master himself to speak. He stretched out his hand, and drew her to him. "I am at home now. Wherever you are is my home."

When Norman came out of his private office, there was such a change in him that the clerks who had remained at the bank thought that he must have received some great aid from the lady who had been closeted with him so long. He had a few brief words with the cashier, explaining that he would be back at the bank before eight o'clock in the morning, and saying good night, hurried to the door after Mrs. Wentworth. Handing her into the carriage, he ordered the coachman to drive home, and, springing in after her, he closed the door behind him, and they drove off.

Keith, meantime, had not been idle. After leaving Mrs. Wentworth, he drove straight to a detective agency. Fortunately the chief was in, and Keith was ushered into his private office immediately. He was a quiet-looking, stout man, with a gray moustache and keen dark eyes. He might have been a moderately successful merchant or official, but for the calmness of his manner and the low tones of his voice. Keith came immediately to the point.

"I have a piece of important work on hand this evening," he said, "of a private and delicate nature." The detective's look was acquiescent. "Could I get Dennison?"

"I think so."

Keith stated his case. At the mention of Wickersham's name a slight change—the very slightest—flickered across the detective's calm face. Keith could not tell whether it was mere surprise or whether it was gratification.

"Now you see precisely what I wish," he said, as he finished stating the case and unfolding his plan. "It may not be necessary for him even to appear, but I wish him to be on hand in case I should need his service. If Wickersham does not accede to my demand, I shall arrest him for the fraud I have mentioned. If

he does accede, I wish Dennison to accompany him to the boat of the South American Line that sails to-morrow morning, and not leave him until the pilot comes off. I do not apprehend that he will refuse when he knows the hand that I hold."

"No, he will not. He knows what would happen if proceedings were started," said the detective. "Excuse me a moment." He walked out of the office, closing the door behind him, and a few minutes later returned with David Dennison.

"Mr. Keith, this is Mr. John Dimm. I have explained to him the nature of the service you require of him." He looked at Mr. Dimm, who simply nodded his acquiescence. "You will take your orders from Mr. Keith, should anything arise to change his plans, and act accordingly."

"I know him," said Keith, amused at the cool professional air with which his old friend greeted him in the presence of his principal.

Dave simply blinked; but his eyes had a fire in them.

It was arranged that Dennison should precede Keith to the place he had mentioned and order a supper there, while Keith should get

the ticket at the steamship office and then follow him. So when Keith had completed his arrangements, he found Dennison at supper at a table near the ladies' entrance, a view of which he commanded in a mirror just before him. Mr. Dimm's manner had entirely changed. He was a man of the world and a host as he handed Keith to his seat.

"A supper for two has been ordered in private dining-room 21, for 9:45," he said in an undertone as the waiter moved off. "They do not know whether it is for a gentleman and a lady, or two gentlemen; but I suppose it is for a lady, as he has been here a number of times with ladies. If you are sure that the lady will not come, you might wait for him there. I will remain here until he comes, and follow him up, in case you need me."

Keith feared that the waiter might mention his presence.

"Oh, no; he knows us," said Dave, with a faint smile at the bare suggestion.

Mr. Dimm called the head-waiter and spoke to him in an undertone. The waiter himself showed Keith up to the room, where he found a table daintily set with two covers.

The champagne-cooler, filled with ice, was al-

ready on the floor beside the table. Keith looked at it grimly. The curtains of the window were down, and Keith walked over to see on what street the window looked. It was a deep embrasure. The shade was drawn down, and he raised it, to find that the window faced on a dead-wall. At the moment the door opened and he heard Wickersham's voice.

"No one has come yet?"

"No, sir, not as I knows of," stammered the waiter. "I have just come on."

"Where is Jacques, the man who usually waits on me?" demanded Wickersham, half angrily.

"Jacques est souffrant. Il est très malade."

Wickersham grunted. "Well, take this," he said, "and remember that if you serve me properly there will be a good deal more to follow."

The waiter thanked him profusely.

"Now, get down and be on the lookout, and when a lady comes and asks for 21, show her up immediately. If she asks who is here, tell her two gentlemen and a lady. You understand?"

The waiter bowed his assent and retired. Wickersham came in and closed the door behind him.

He had just thrown his coat on a chair, laid his hat on the mantelpiece, and was twirling his moustache at the mirror above it, when he caught sight in the mirror of Keith. Keith had stepped out behind him from the recess, and was standing by the table, quietly looking at him. He gave an exclamation and turned quickly.

"Hah! What is this? You here! What are you doing here? There is some mistake." He glanced at the door.

"No, there is no mistake," said Keith, advancing; "I am waiting for you."

"For me! Waiting for me?" he demanded, mystified.

"Yes. Did you not tell the waiter just now a gentleman was here? I confess you do not seem very pleased to see me."

"You have read my looks correctly," said Wickersham, who was beginning to recover himself, and with it his scornful manner. "You are the last person on earth I wish to see—ever. I do not know that I should weep if I never had that pleasure again."

Keith bowed.

"I think it probable. You may, hereafter, have even less cause for joy at meeting me."

"Impossible," said Wickersham.

Keith put his hand on a chair, and prepared to sit down, motioning Wickersham to take the other seat.

"The lady you are waiting for will not be here this evening," he said, "and it may be that our interview will be protracted."

Wickersham passed by the last words.

"What lady? Who says I am waiting for a lady?"

"You said so at the door just now. Besides, I say so."

"Oh! You were listening, were you?" he sneered.

"Yes; I heard it."

"How do you know she will not be here? What do you know about it?"

"I know that she will no more be here than the Countess Torelli will," said Keith. He was looking Wickersham full in the face and saw that the shot went home.

"What do you want?" demanded Wickersham. "Why are you here? Are you after money or a row?"

"I want you—I want you, first, to secure all of Mrs. Wentworth's money that you have had, or as much as you can."

Wickersham was so taken back that his dark face turned almost white, but he recovered himself quickly.

"You are a madman, or some one has been deceiving you. You are the victim of a delusion."

Keith, with his eyes fastened on him, shook his head.

"Oh, no; I am not."

A look of perplexed innocence came over Wickersham's face.

"Yes, you are," he said, in an almost friendly tone. "You are the victim of some hallucination. I give you my word, I do not know even what you are talking about. I should say you were engaged in blackmail—" The expression in his eyes changed like a flash, but something in Keith's eyes, as they met his, caused him to add, "if I did not know that you were a man of character. I, too, am a man of character, Mr. Keith. I want you to know it." Keith's eyes remained calm and cold as steel. Wickersham faltered. "I am a man of means—of large means. I am worth— My balance in bank this moment is—is more than you will ever be worth. Now I want to ask you why,

in the name of Heaven, should I want anything to do with Mrs. Wentworth's money?"

"If you have such a balance in bank," said Keith, "it will simplify my mission, for you will doubtless be glad to return Mr. Wentworth's money that you have had from Mrs. Wentworth. I happen to know that his money will come in very conveniently for Norman just now."

"Oh, you come from Wentworth, do you?" demanded Wickersham.

"No; from Mrs. Wentworth," returned Keith.

"Did she send you?" Wickersham shot at Keith a level glance from under his half-closed lids.

"I offered to come. She knows I am here."

"What proof have I of that?"

"My statement."

"And suppose I do not please to accept your statement?"

Keith leant a little toward him over the table.

"You will accept it."

"He must hold a strong hand," thought Wickersham. He shifted his ground suddenly. "What, in the name of Heaven, are you driving at, Keith? What are you after? Come to the point."

"I will," said Keith, rising. "Let us drop our masks; they are not becoming to you, and I am not accustomed to them. I have come for several things: one of them is Mrs. Wentworth's money, which you got from her under false pretences." He spoke slowly, and his eyes were looking in the other's eyes.

Wickersham sprang to his feet.

"What do you mean, sir?" he demanded, with an oath. "I have already told you—! I will let no man speak to me in that way."

Keith did not stir. Wickersham paused to get his breath.

"You would not dare to speak so if a lady's name were not involved, and you did not know that I cannot act as I would, for fear of compromising her."

An expression of contempt swept across Keith's face.

"Sit down," he said. "I will relieve your mind. Mrs. Wentworth is quite ready to meet any disclosures that may come. I have her power of attorney. She has gone to her husband and told him everything."

Wickersham's face whitened, and he could not repress the look of mingled astonishment and fear that stole into his eyes.

"Now, having given you that information," continued Keith, "I say that you stole Mrs. Wentworth's money, and I have come to recover it, if possible."

Wickersham rose to his feet. With a furious oath he sprang for his overcoat, and, snatching it up, began to feel for the pocket.

"I'll blow your brains out."

"No, you will not," said Keith, "and I advise you to make less noise. An officer is outside, and I have but to whistle to place you where nothing will help you. A warrant is out for your arrest, and I have the proof to convict you."

Wickersham, with his coat still held in one hand, and the other in the pocket, shot a glance at Keith. He was daunted by his coolness.

"You must think you hold a strong hand," he said. "But I have known them to fail."

Keith bowed.

"No doubt. This one will not fail. I have taken pains that it shall not, and I have other cards which I have not shown you. Sit down and listen to me, and you shall judge for yourself."

With a muttered oath, Wickersham walked back to his seat; but before he did so, he slipped

quietly into his pocket a pistol which he took from his overcoat.

Quickly as the act was done, Keith saw it.

"Don't you think you had better put your pistol back?" he said quietly. "An officer is waiting just outside that door, a man that can neither be bullied nor bought. Perhaps, you will agree with me when I tell you that, though called Dimm, his real name is David Dennison. He has orders at the least disturbance to place you under arrest. Judge for yourself what chance you will have."

"What do you wish me to do?" asked Wickersham, sullenly.

"I wish you, first, to execute some papers which will secure to Norman Wentworth, as far as can possibly be done, the amount of money that you have gotten from Mrs. Wentworth under the pretence of investing it for her in mines. Mrs. Wentworth's name will not be mentioned in this instrument. The money was her husband's, and you knew it, and you knew it was impairing his estate to furnish it. Secondly, I require that you shall leave the country to-morrow morning. I have arranged for passage for you, on a steamer sailing before sunrise."

"Thank you," sneered Wickersham. "Really, you are very kind."

"Thirdly, you will sign a paper which contains only a few of the facts, but enough, perhaps, to prevent your returning to this country for some years to come."

Wickersham leant across the table and burst out laughing.

"And you really think I will do that? How old do you think I am? Why did you not bring me a milk-bottle and a rattle? You do my intellect a great deal of honor."

For answer Keith tapped twice on a glass with the back of a knife. The next second the door opened, and Dave Dennison entered, impassive, but calmly observant, and with a face set like a rock.

At sight of him Wickersham's face whitened.

"One moment, Dave," said Keith; "wait outside a moment more."

Dennison bowed and closed the door. The latch clicked, but the knob did not settle back.

"I will give you one minute in which to decide," said Keith. He drew from his pocket and threw on the table two papers. "There are the papers." He took out his watch and waited.

Wickersham picked up the papers mechan-

ically and glanced over them. His face settled. Gambler that he was with the fortunes of men and the reputations of women, he knew that he had lost. He tried one more card—it was a poor one.

"Why are you so hard on me?" he asked, with something like a whine—a faint whine—in his voice. "You, who I used to think—whom I have known from boyhood, you have always been so hard on me! What did I ever do to you that you should have hounded me so?"

Keith's face showed that the charge had reached him, but it failed of the effect that Wickersham had hoped for. His lip curled slightly.

"I am not hard on you; I am easy on you—but not for your sake," he added vehemently. "You have betrayed every trust reposed in you. You have deceived men and betrayed women. No vow has been sacred enough to restrain you; no tie strong enough to hold you. Affection, friendship, faith, have all been trampled under your feet. You have deliberately attempted to destroy the happiness of one of the best friends you have ever had; have betrayed his trust and tried to ruin his life. If I served you right I would place you beyond the

power to injure any one, forever. The reason I do not is not on your account, but because I played with you when we were boys, and because I do not know how far my personal feeling might influence me in carrying out what I still recognize as mere justice." He closed his watch. "Your time is up. Do you agree?"

"I will sign the papers," said Wickersham, sullenly.

Keith drew out a pen and handed it to him. Wickersham, signed the papers slowly and deliberately.

"When did you take to writing backhand?" asked Keith.

"I have done it for several years," declared Wickersham. "I had writer's cramp once."

The expression on Keith's face was very like a sneer, but he tried to suppress it.

"It will do," he said, as he folded the papers and took another envelope from his pocket. "This is your ticket for the steamer for Buenos Ayres, which sails to-morrow morning at high tide. Dennison will go with you to a notary to acknowledge these papers, and then will show you aboard of her and will see that you remain aboard until the pilot leaves her. To-morrow a warrant will be put in the hands of

an officer and an application will be made for a receiver for your property."

Wickersham leant back in his chair, with hate speaking from every line of his face.

"You will administer on my effects? I suppose you are also going to be administrator, *de bonis non,* of the lady in whose behalf you have exhibited such sudden interest?"

Keith's face paled and his nostrils dilated for a moment. He leant slightly forward and spoke slowly, his burning eyes fastened on Wickersham's face.

"Your statement would be equally infamous whether it were true or false. You know that it is a lie, and you know that I know it is a lie. I will let that suffice. Ihave nothing further to say to you." He tapped on the edge of the glass again, and Dennison walked in. "Dennison," he said, " Mr. Wickersham has agreed to my plans. He will go aboard the Buenos Ayres boat to-night. You will go with him to the office I spoke of, where he will acknowledge these papers; then you will accompany him to his home and get whatever clothes he may require, and you will not lose sight of him until you come off with the pilot."

Dennison bowed without a word; but his eyes snapped.

"If he makes any attempt to evade, or gives you any cause to think he is trying to evade, his agreement, you have your instructions."

Dennison bowed again, silently.

"I now leave you." Keith rose and inclined his head slightly toward Wickersham.

As he turned, Wickersham shot at him a Parthian arrow:

"I hope you understand, Mr. Keith, that the obligations I have signed are not the only obligations I recognize. I owe you a personal debt, and I mean to live to pay it. I *shall* pay it, somehow."

Keith turned and looked at him steadily.

"I understand perfectly. It is the only kind of debt, as far as I know, that you recognize. Your statement has added nothing to what I knew. It matters little what you do to me. I have, at least, saved two friends from you."

He walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

As Wickersham pulled on his gloves, he glanced at Dave Dennison. But what he saw in his face deterred him from speaking. His eyes were like coals of fire.

"I am waiting," he said. "Hurry."

Wickersham walked out in silence.

The following afternoon, when Dave Dennison reported that he had left his charge on board the outgoing steamer, bound for a far South American port, Keith felt as if the atmosphere had in some sort cleared.

A few days later Phrony's worn spirit found rest. Keith, as he had already arranged, telegraphed Dr. Balsam of her death, and the Doctor went over and told Squire Rawson, at the same time, that she had been found and lost.

The next day Keith and Dave Dennison took back to the South all that remained of the poor creature who had left there a few years before in such high hopes.

One lady, closely veiled, attended the little service that old Dr. Templeton conducted in the chapel of the hospital where Phrony had passed away, before the body was taken South. Alice Lancaster had been faithful to the end in looking after her.

Phrony was buried in the Rawson lot in the little burying-ground at Ridgely, not far from the spot where lay the body of General Huntington. As Keith passed this grave he saw that flowers had been laid on it recently, but they had withered.

All the Ridge-neighborhood gathered to do

honor to Phrony and to testify their sympathy for her grandfather. It was an exhibition of feeling such as Keith had not seen since he left the country. The old man appeared stronger than he had seemed for some time. He took charge and gave directions in a clear and steady voice.

When the services were over and the last word had been said, he stepped forward and raised his hand.

"I've got her back," he said. "I've got her back where nobody can take her from me again. I was mighty harsh on her; but I've done forgive her long ago—and I hope she knows it now. I heard once that the man that took her away said he didn't marry her. But—" He paused for a moment, then went on: "He was a liar. I've got the proof.— But I want you all to witness that if I ever meet him, in this world or the next, the Lord do so to me, and more also! if I don't kill him!" He paused again, and his breathing was the only sound that was heard in the deathly stillness that had fallen on the listening crowd.

"—And if any man interferes and balks me in my right," he continued slowly, "I 'll have his blood. Good-by. I thank you for her."

He turned back to the grave and began to smooth the sides.

Keith's eyes fell on Dave Dennison, where he stood on the outer edge of the crowd. His face was sphinx-like; but his bosom heaved twice, and Keith knew that two men waited to meet Wickersham.

As the crowd melted away, whispering among themselves, Keith crossed over and laid a rose on General Huntington's grave.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE CONSULTATION

KEITH had been making up his mind for some time to go to Brookford. New York had changed utterly for him since Lois left. The whole world seemed to have changed.

The day after he reached New York, Keith received a letter from Miss Brooke. She wrote that her niece was ill and had asked her to write and request him to see Mrs. Lancaster, who would explain something to him. She did not say what it was. She added that she wished she had never heard of New York. It was a cry of anguish.

Keith's heart sank like lead. For the first time in his life he had a presentiment. Lois Huntington would die, and he would never see her again. Despair took hold of him. Keith could stand it no longer. He went to Brookford.

The Lawns was one of those old-fashioned country places, a few miles outside of the town, such as our people of means used to have a few generations ago, before they had lost the land-holding instinct of their English ancestors and gained the herding proclivity of modern life. The extensive yard and grounds were filled with shrubbery—lilacs, rose-bushes, and evergreens —and shaded by fine old trees, among which the birds were singing as Keith drove up the curving road, and over all was an air of quietude and peace which filled his heart with tenderness.

"This is the bower she came from," he thought to himself, gazing around. "Here is the country garden where the rose grew."

Miss Brooke was unfeignedly surprised to see Keith.

She greeted him most civilly. Lois had long since explained everything to her, and she made Keith a more than ample apology for her letter. "But you must admit," she said, "that your actions were very suspicious.—When a New York man is handing dancing-women to their carriages!" A gesture and nod completed the sentence.

"But I am not a New York man," said Keith.

"Oh, you are getting to be a very fair counterfeit," said the old lady, half grimly.

Lois was very ill. She had been under a great strain in New York, and had finally broken down.

Among other items of interest that Keith gleaned was that Dr. Locaman, the resident physician at Brookford, was a suitor of Lois. Keith asked leave to send for a friend who was a man of large experience and a capital doctor.

"Well, I should be glad to have him sent for. These men here are dividing her up into separate pieces, and meantime she is going down the hill every day. Send for any one who will treat her as a whole human being and get her well."

So Keith telegraphed that day for Dr. Balsam, saying that he wanted him badly, and would be under lasting obligations if he would come to Brookford at once.

Brookford! The name called up many associations to the old physician. It was from Brookford that that young girl with her brown eyes and dark hair had walked into his life so long ago. It was from Brookford that the decree had come that had doomed him to a life of loneliness and exile. A desire seized him to see

the place. Abby Brooke had been living a few years before. She might be living now.

As the Doctor descended from the cars, he was met by Keith, who told him that the patient was the daughter of General Huntington—the little girl he had known so long ago.

"I thought, perhaps, it was your widow," said the Doctor.

A little dash of color stole into Keith's grave face, then flickered out.

"No." He changed the subject, and went on to say that the other physicians had arranged to meet him at the house. Then he gave him a little history of the case.

"You are very much interested in her?"

"I have known her a long time, you see. Yes. Her aunt is a friend of mine."

"He is in love with her," said the old man to himself. "She has cut the widow out."

As they entered the hall, Miss Abby came out of a room. She looked worn and ill.

"Ah!" said Keith. "Here she is." He turned to present the Doctor, but stopped with his lips half opened. The two stood fronting each other, their amazed eyes on each other's faces, as it were across the space of a whole generation.

"Theophilus!"

"Abby!"

This was all. The next moment they were shaking hands as if they had parted the week before instead of thirty-odd years ago. "I told you I would come if you ever needed me," said the Doctor. "I have come."

"And I never needed you more, and I have needed you often. It was good in you to come—for my little girl." Her voice suddenly broke, and she turned away, her handkerchief at her eyes.

The Doctor's expression settled into one of deep concern. "There—there. Don't distress yourself. We must reserve our powers. We may need them. Now, if you will show me to my room for a moment, I would like to get myself ready before going in to see your little girl."

Just as the Doctor reappeared, the other doctors came out of the sick-room, the local physician, a simple young man, following the city specialist with mingled pride and awe. The latter was a silent, self-reliant man with a keen eye, thin lips, and a dry, business manner. They were presented to the Doctor as Dr. Memberly and Dr. Locaman, and looked him over. There

was a certain change of manner in each of them: the younger man, after a glance, increased perceptibly his show of respect toward the city man; the latter treated the Doctor with civility, but talked in an ex-cathedra way. He understood the case and had no question as to its treatment. As for Dr. Balsam, his manner was the same to both, and had not changed a particle. He said not a word except to ask questions as to symptoms and the treatment that had been followed. The Doctor's face changed during the recital, and when it was ended his expression was one of deep thoughtfulness.

The consultation ended, they all went into the sick-room, Dr. Memberly, the specialist, first, the young doctor next, and Dr. Balsam last. Dr. Memberly addressed the nurse, and Dr. Locaman followed him like his shadow, enforcing his words and copying insensibly his manner. Dr. Balsam walked over to the bedside, and leaning over, took the patient's thin, wan hand.

"My dear, I am Dr. Balsam. Do you remember me?"

She glanced at him, at first languidly, then with more interest, and then, as recollection returned to her, with a faint smile.

"Now we must get well."

Again she smiled faintly.

The Doctor drew up a chair, and, without speaking further, began to stroke her hand, his eyes resting on her face.

One who had seen the old physician before he entered that house could scarcely have known him as the same man who sat by the bed holding the hand of the wan figure lying so placid before him. At a distance he appeared a plain countryman; on nearer view his eyes and mouth and set chin gave him a look of unexpected determination. When he entered a sick-room he was like a king coming to his own. He took command and fought disease as an arch-enemy. So now.

Dr. Memberly came to the bedside and began to talk in a low, professional tone. Lois shut her eyes, but her fingers closed slightly on Dr. Balsam's hand.

"The medicine appears to have quieted her somewhat. I have directed the nurse to continue it," observed Dr. Memberly.

"Quite so. By all means continue it," assented Dr. Locaman. "She is decidedly quieter."

Dr. Balsam's head inclined just enough to show that he heard him, and he went on stroking her hand.

"Is there anything you would suggest further than has already been done?" inquired the city physician of Dr. Balsam.

"No. I think not."

"I must catch the 4:30 train," said the former to the younger man. "Doctor, will you drive me down to the station?"

"Yes, certainly. With pleasure."

"Doctor, you say you are going away tonight?" This from the city physician to Dr. Balsam.

"No, sir; I shall stay for a day or two." The fingers of the sleeper quite closed on his hand. "I have several old friends here. In fact, this little girl is one of them, and I want to get her up."

The look of the other changed, and he cleared his throat with a dry, metallic cough.

"You may rest satisfied that everything has been done for the patient that science can do," he said stiffly.

"I think so. We won't rest till we get the little girl up," said the older doctor. "Now we will take off our coats and work."

Once more the fingers of the sleeper almost clutched his.

When the door closed, Lois turned her head

and opened her eyes, and when the wheels were heard driving away she looked at the Doctor with a wan little smile, which he answered with a twinkle.

"When did you come?" she asked faintly. It was the first sign of interest she had shown in anything for days.

"A young friend of mine, Gordon Keith, told me you were sick, and asked me to come, and I have just arrived. He brought me up." He watched the change in her face.

"I am so much obliged to you. Where is he now?"

"He is here. Now we must get well," he said encouragingly. "And to do that we must get a little sleep."

"Very well. You are going to stay with me?"

"Yes."

"Thank you"; and she closed her eyes tranquilly and, after a little, fell into a doze.

When the Doctor came out of the sick-room he had done what the other physicians had not done and could not do. He had fathomed the case, and, understanding the cause, he was able to prescribe the cure.

"With the help of God we will get your little girl well," he said to Miss Abby.

"I begin to hope, and I had begun to despair," she said. "It was good of you to come."

"I am glad I came, and I will come whenever you want me, Abby," replied the old Doctor, simply.

From this time, as he promised, so he performed. He took off his coat, and using the means which the city specialist had suggested, he studied his patient's case and applied all his powers to the struggle.

The great city doctor recorded the case among his cures; but in his treatment he did not reckon the sleepless hours that that country doctor had sat by the patient's bedside, the unremitting struggle he had made, holding Death at bay, inspiring hope, and holding desperately every inch gained.

When the Doctor saw Keith he held out his hand to him. "I am glad you sent for me."

"How is she, Doctor? Will she get well?"

"I trust so. She has been under some strain. It is almost as if she had had a shock."

Keith's mind sprang back to that evening in the Park, and he cursed Wickersham in his heart.

"Possibly she has had some strain on her emotions?"

Keith did not know.

"I understand that there is a young man here who has been in love with her for some time, and her aunt thinks she returned the sentiment."

Keith did not know. But the Doctor's words were like a dagger in his heart.

Keith went back to work; but he seemed to himself to live in darkness. As soon as a gleam of light appeared, it was suddenly quenched. Love was not for him.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE MISTRESS OF THE LAWNS

STRANGE to say, the episode in which Keith had figured as the reliever of Norman Wentworth's embarrassment had a very different effect upon those among whom he had moved, from what he had expected. Keith's part in the transaction was well known.

His part, too, in the Wickersham matter was understood by his acquaintances. Wickersham had as good as absconded, some said; and there were many to tell how long they had prophesied this very thing, and how well they had known his villany. Mrs. Nailor was particularly vindictive. She had recently put some money in his mining scheme, and she could have hanged him. She did the next thing: she damned him. She even extended her rage to old Mrs. Wickersham, who, poor lady, had lost her home and everything she had in the world through Ferdy.

The Norman-Wentworths, who had moved out of the splendid residence that Mrs. Norman's extravagance had formerly demanded, into the old house on Washington Square, which was still occupied by old Mrs. Wentworth, were, if anything, drawn closer than ever to their real friends; but they were distinctly deposed from the position which Mrs. Wentworth had formerly occupied in the gay set, who to her had hitherto been New York. They were far happier than they had ever been. A new light had come into Norman's face, and a softness began to dawn in hers which Keith had never seen there before. Around them, too, began to gather friends whom Keith had never known of, who had the charm that breeding and kindness give, and opened his eyes to a life there of which he had hitherto hardly dreamed. Keith, however, to his surprise, when he was in New York, found himself more sought after by his former acquaintances than ever before. The cause was a simple one. He was believed to be very rich. He must have made a large fortune. The mystery in which it was involved but added to its magnitude. No man but one of immense wealth could have done what Keith did the day he stopped the run on Wentworth & Son. Any

other supposition was incredible. Moreover, it was now plain that in a little while he would marry Mrs. Lancaster, and then he would be one of the wealthiest men in New York. He was undoubtedly a coming man. Men who, a short time ago, would not have wasted a moment's thought on him, now greeted him with cordiality and spoke of him with respect; women who, a year or two before, would not have seen him in a ball-room, now smiled to him on the street, invited him among their "best companies," and treated him with distinguished favor. Mrs. Nailor actually pursued him. Even Mr. Kestrel, pale, thin-lipped, and frosty as ever in appearance, thawed into something like cordiality when he met him, and held out an icy hand as with a wintry smile he congratulated him on his success.

"Well, we Yankees used to think we had the monopoly of business ability, but we shall have to admit that some of you young fellows at the South know your business. You have done what cost the Wickershams some millions. If you want any help at any time, come in and talk to me. We had a little difference once; but I don't let a little thing like that stand in the way with a friend."

Keith felt his jaws lock as he thought of the same man on the other side of a long table sneering at him.

"Thank you," said he. "My success has been greatly exaggerated. You'd better not count too much on it."

Keith knew that he was considered rich, and it disturbed him. For the first time in his life he felt that he was sailing under false colors.

Often the fair face, handsome figure, and cordial, friendly air of Alice Lancaster came to him; not so often, it is true, as another, a younger and gentler face, but still often enough. He admired her greatly. He trusted her. Why should he not try his fortune there, and be happy? Alice Lancaster was good enough for him. Yes, that was the trouble. She was far too good for him if he addressed her without loving her utterly. Other reasons, too, suggested themselves. He began to find himself fitting more and more into the city life. He had the chance possibly to become rich, richer than ever, and with it to secure a charming companion. Why should he not avail himself of it? Amid the glitter and gayety of his surroundings in the city, this temptation grew stronger and stronger. Miss Abby's sharp speech recurred to him. He

was becoming "a fair counterfeit" of the men he had once despised. Then came a new form of temptation. What power this wealth would give him! How much good he could accomplish with it!

When the temptation grew too overpowering he left his office and went down into the country. It always did him good to go there. To be there was like a plunge in a cool, limpid pool. He had been so long in the turmoil and strife of the struggle for success—for wealth; had been so wholly surrounded by those who strove as he strove, tearing and trampling and rending those who were in their way, that he had almost lost sight of the life that lay outside of the dust and din of that arena. He had almost forgotten that life held other rewards than riches. He had forgotten the calm and tranquil region that stretched beyond the moil and anguish of the strife for gain.

Here his father walked with him again, calm, serene, and elevated, his thoughts high above all commercial matters, ranging the fields of lofty speculation with statesmen, philosophers, and poets, holding up to his gaze again lofty ideals; practising, without a thought of reward, the very gospel of universal gentleness and kindness.

There his mother, too, moved in spirit once more beside him with her angelic smile, breathing the purity of heaven. How far away it seemed from that world in which he had been living!—as far as they were from the worldlings who made it.

Curiously, when he was in New York he found himself under the allurement of Alice Lancaster. When he was in the country he found that he was in love with Lois Huntington.

It was this that mystified and worried him. He believed—that is, he almost believed—that Alice Lancaster would marry him. His friends thought that she would. Several of them had told him so. Many of them acted on this belief. And this had something to do with his retirement.

As much as he liked Alice Lancaster, as clearly as he felt how but for one fact it would have suited that they should marry, one fact changed everything: he was not in love with her.

He was in love with a young girl who had never given him a thought except as a sort of hereditary friend. Turning from one door at which the light of happiness had shone, he had found himself caught at another from which a radiance shone that dimmed all other lights.

Yet it was fast shut. At length he determined to cut the knot. He would put his fate to the test.

Two days after he formed this resolve he walked into the hotel at Brookford and registered. As he turned, he stood face to face with Mrs. Nailor. Mrs. Nailor of late had been all cordiality to him.

"Why, you dear boy, where did you come from?" she asked him in pleased surprise. "I thought you were stretched at Mrs. Wentworth's feet in the— Where has she been this summer?"

Keith's brow clouded. He remembered when Wickersham was her "dear boy."

"It is a position I am not in the habit of occupying—at least, toward ladies who have husbands to occupy it. You are thinking of some one else," he added coldly, wishing devoutly that Mrs. Nailor were in Halifax.

"Well, I am glad you have come here. You remember, our friendship began in the country? Yes? My husband had to go and get sick, and I got really frightened about him, and so we determined to come here, where we should be perfectly quiet. We got here last Saturday. There is not a man here."

"Isn't there?" asked Keith, wishing there were not a woman either. "How long are you going to stay?" he asked absently.

"Oh, perhaps a month. How long shall you be here?"

"Not very long," said Keith.

"I tell you who is here; that little governess of Mrs. Wentworth's she was so disagreeable to last winter. She has been very ill. I think it was the way she was treated in New York. She was in love with Ferdy Wickersham, you know? She lives here, in a lovely old place just outside of town, with her old aunt or cousin. I had no idea she had such a nice old home. We saw her yesterday. We met her on the street."

"I remember her; I shall go and see her," said Keith, recalling Mrs. Nailor's speech at Mrs. Wickersham's dinner, and Lois's revenge.

"I tell you what we will do. She invited us to call, and we will go together," said Mrs. Nailor.

Keith paused a moment in reflection, and then said casually:

"When are you going?"

"Oh, this afternoon."

"Very well; I will go."

Mrs. Nailor drove Keith out to The Lawns that afternoon.

In a little while Miss Huntington came in. Keith observed that she was dressed as she had been that evening at dinner, in white, but he did not dream that it was the result of thought. He did not know with what care every touch had been made to reproduce just what he had praised, or with what sparkling eyes she had surveyed the slim, dainty figure in the old cheval-glass. She greeted Mrs. Nailor civilly and Keith warmly.

"I am very glad to see you. What in the world brought you here to this out-of-the-way place?" she said, turning to the latter and giving him her cool, soft hand, and looking up at him with unfeigned pleasure, a softer and deeper glow coming into her cheek as she gazed into his eyes.

"A sudden fit of insanity," said Keith, taking in the sweet, girlish figure in his glance. "I wanted to see some roses that I knew bloomed in an old garden about here."

"He, perhaps, thought that, as Brookford is growing so fashionable now, he might find a mutual friend of ours here?" Mrs. Nailor said.

"As whom, for instance?" queried Keith, unwilling to commit himself.

"You know, Alice Lancaster has been talking

of coming here? Now, don't pretend that you don't know. Whom does every one say you are —all in pursuit of?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Keith, calmly. "I suppose that you are referring to Mrs. Lancaster, but I happened to know that she was not here. No; I came to see Miss Huntington." His face wore an expression of amusement.

Mrs. Nailor made some smiling reply. She did not see the expression in Keith's eyes as they, for a second, caught Lois's glance.

Just then Miss Abigail came in. She had grown whiter since Keith had seen her last, and looked older. She greeted Mrs. Nailor graciously, and Keith cordially. Miss Lois, for some reason of her own, was plying Mrs. Nailor with questions, and Keith fell to talking with Miss Abigail, though his eyes were on Lois most of the time.

The old lady was watching her, too, and the girl, under the influence of the earnest gaze, glanced around and, catching her aunt's eye upon her, flashed her a little answering smile full of affection and tenderness, and then went on listening intently to Mrs. Nailor; though, had Keith read aright the color rising in her cheeks, he might have guessed that she was giving at

least half her attention to his side of the room, where Miss Abigail was talking of her. Keith, however, was just then much interested in Miss Abigail's account of Dr. Locaman, who, it seemed, was more attentive to Lois than ever.

"I don't know what she will do," she said. "I suppose she will decide soon. It is an affair of long standing."

Keith's throat had grown dry.

"I had hoped that my cousin Norman might prove a protector for her; but his wife is not a good person. I was mad to let her go there. But she would go. She thought she could be of some service. But that woman is such a fool!"

"Oh, she is not a bad woman," interrupted Keith.

"I do not know how bad she is," said Abigail. "She is a fool. No good woman would ever have allowed such intimacy as she allowed to come between her and her husband; and none but a fool would have permitted a man to make her his dupe. She did not even have the excuse of a temptation; for she is as cold as a tombstone."

"I assure you that you are mistaken," defended Keith. "I know her, and I believe that she has far more depth than you give her credit for—"

"I give her credit for none," said Miss Abigail, decisively. "You men are all alike. You think a woman with a pretty face who does not talk much is deep, when she is only dull. On my word, I think it is almost worse to bring about such a scandal without cause than to give a real cause for it. In the latter case there is at least the time-worn excuse of woman's frailty."

Keith laughed.

"They are all so stupid," asserted Miss Abigail, fiercely. "They are giving up their privileges to be—what? I blushed for my sex when I was there. They are beginning to mistake civility for servility. I found a plenty of old ladies tottering on the edge of the grave, like myself, and I found a number of ladies in the shops and in the churches; but in that set that you go with—! They all want to be 'women'; next thing they'll want to be like men. I sha'n't be surprised to see them come to wearing men's clothes and drinking whiskey and smoking tobacco—the little fools! As if they thought that a woman who has to curl her hair and spend a half-hour over her dress to look decent could ever be on a level with a man who can handle a trunk or drive a wagon or add up a column of figures, and can wash his face and hands and

put on a clean collar and look like—a gentleman!"

"Oh, not so bad as that," said Keith.

"Yes; there is no limit to their folly. I know them. I am one myself."

"But you do not want to be a man?"

"No, not now. I am too old and dependent. But I'll let you into a secret. I am secretly envious of them. I'd like to be able to put them down under my heel and make them squeal."

Mrs. Nailor turned and spoke to the old lady. She was evidently about to take her leave. Keith moved over, and for the first time addressed Miss Huntington.

"I want you to show me about these grounds," he said, speaking so that both ladies could hear him. He rose, and both walked out of the parlor. When Mrs. Nailor came out, Keith and his guide were nowhere to be found, so she had to wait; but a half-hour afterwards he and Miss Huntington came back from the stables.

As they drove out of the grounds they passed a good-looking young fellow just going in. Keith recognized Dr. Locaman.

"That is the young man who is so attentive to your friend," said Mrs. Nailor; "Dr. Locaman. He saved her life and now is going to marry her."

It gave Keith a pang.

"I know him. He did not save her life. If anybody did that, it was an old country doctor, Dr. Balsam."

"That old man! I thought he was dead years ago."

"Well, he is not. He is very much alive."

A few evenings later Keith found Mrs. Lancaster in the hotel. He had just arrived from The Lawns when Mrs. Lancaster came down to dinner. Her greeting was perfect. Even Mrs. Nailor was mystified. She had never looked handsomer. Her black gown fitted perfectly her trim figure, and a single red rose, half-blown, caught in her bodice, was her only ornament. She possessed the gift of simplicity. She was a beautiful walker, and as she moved slowly down the long dining-room as smoothly as a piece of perfect machinery, every eye was upon her. She knew that she was being generally observed, and the color deepened in her cheeks and added the charm of freshness to her beauty.

"By Jove! what a stunning woman!" exclaimed a man at a table near by to his wife.

"It is not difficult to be 'a stunning woman' in a Worth gown, my dear," she said sweetly. "May I trouble you for the Worcestershire?"

Keith's attitude toward Mrs. Lancaster puzzled even so old a veteran as Mrs. Nailor.

Mrs. Nailor was an adept in the art of inquisition. To know about her friends' affairs was one of the objects of her life, and it was not only the general facts that she insisted on knowing: she proposed to be acquainted with their deepest secrets and the smallest particulars. She knew Alice Lancaster's views, or believed she did; but she had never ventured to speak on the subject to Gordon Keith. In fact, she stood in awe of Keith, and now he had mystified her by his action. Finally, she could stand it no longer, and so next evening she opened fire on Keith. Having screwed her courage to the sticking-point, she attacked boldly. She caught him on the verandah, smoking alone, and watching him closely to catch the effect of her attack, said suddenly:

"I want to ask you a question: are you in love with Alice Lancaster?"

Keith turned slowly and looked at her, looked at her so long that she began to blush.

"Don't you think, if I am, I had better inform her first?" he said quietly.

Mrs. Nailor was staggered; but she was in for it, and she had to fight her way through. "I

was scared to death, my dear," she said when she repeated this part of the conversation, "for I never know just how he is going to take anything; but he was so quiet, I went on."

"Well, yes, I think you had," she said; "Alice can take care of herself; but I tell you that you have no right to be carrying on with that sweet, innocent young girl here. You know what people say of you?"

"No; I do not," said Keith. "I was not aware that I was of sufficient importance here for people to say anything, except perhaps a few persons who know me."

"They say you have come here to see Miss Huntington?"

"Do they?" asked Keith, so carelessly that Mrs. Nailor was just thinking that she must be mistaken, when he added: "Well, will you ask people if they ever heard what Andrew Jackson said to Mr. Buchanan once when he told him it was time to go and dress to receive Lady Wellesley?"

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Nailor.

"He said he knew a man in Tennessee who had made a fortune by attending to his own business."

Having failed with Keith, Mrs. Nailor, the

next afternoon, called on Miss Huntington. Lois was in, and her aunt was not well; so Mrs. Nailor had a fair field for her research. She decided to test the young girl, and she selected the only mode which could have been successful with herself. She proposed a surprise. She spoke of Keith and noticed the increased interest with which the girl listened. This was promising.

"By the way," she said, "you know the report is that Mr. Keith has at last really surrendered?"

"Has he? I am so glad. If ever a man deserved happiness it is he. Who is it?"

The entire absence of self-consciousness in Lois's expression and voice surprised Mrs. Nailor.

"Mrs. Lancaster," she said, watching for the effect of her answer. "Of course, you know he has always been in love with her?"

The girl's expression of unfeigned admiration of Mrs. Lancaster gave Mrs. Nailor another surprise. She decided that she had been mistaken in suspecting her of caring for Keith.

"He has evidently not proposed yet. If she were a little older I should be certain of it," she said to herself as she drove away; "but

these girls are so secretive one can never tell about them. Even I could not look as innocent as that to save my life if I were interested."

That evening Keith called at The Lawns. He did not take with him a placid spirit. Mrs. Nailor's shaft had gone home, and it rankled. He tried to assure himself that what people were thinking had nothing to do with him. But suppose Miss Abigail took this view of the matter? He determined to ascertain. One solution of the difficulty lay plain before him: he could go away. Another presented itself, but it was preposterous. Of all the women he knew Lois Huntington was the least effected by him in the way that flatters a man. She liked him, he knew; but if he could read women at all, and he thought he could, she liked him only as a friend, and had not a particle of sentiment about him. He was easy, then, as to the point Mrs. Nailor had raised; but had he the right to subject Lois to gossip? This was the main thing that troubled him. He was half angry with himself that it kept rising in his mind. He determined to find out what her aunt thought of it, and decided that he could let that direct his course. This salved his conscience. Once or twice the question presented itself whether

it were possible that Lois could care for him. He banished it resolutely.

When he reached The Lawns, he found that Miss Abigail was sick, so the virtuous plan he had formed fell through. He was trying to fancy himself sorry; but when Lois came out on the verandah in a dainty blue gown which fell softly about her girlish figure, and seated herself with unconscious grace in the easy-chair he pushed up for her, he knew that he was glad to have her all to himself. They fell to talking about her aunt.

"I am dreadfully uneasy about her," the girl said. "Once or twice of late she has had something like fainting spells, and the last one was very alarming. You don't know what she has been to me." She looked up at him with a silent appeal for sympathy which made his heart beat. "She is the only mother I ever knew, and she is all I have in the world." Her voice faltered, and she turned away her head. A tear stole down her cheek and dropped in her lap. "I am so glad you like each other. I hear you are engaged," she said suddenly.

He was startled; it chimed in so with the thought in his mind at the moment.

"No, I am not; but I would like to be."

He came near saying a great deal more; but the girl's eyes were fixed on him so innocently that he for a moment hesitated. He felt it would be folly, if not sacrilege, to go further.

Just then there was a step on the walk, and the young man Keith had seen, Dr. Locaman, came up the steps. He was a handsome man, stout, well-dressed, and well satisfied.

Keith could have consigned him and all his class to a distant and torrid clime.

He came up the steps cheerily and began talking at once. He was so glad to see Keith, and had he heard lately from Dr. Balsam?—"such a fine type of the old country doctor," etc.

No, Keith said; he had not heard lately. His manner had stiffened at the young man's condescension, and he rose to go.

He said casually to Lois, as he shook hands, "How did you hear the piece of news you mentioned?"

"Mrs. Nailor told me. You must tell me all about it."

"I will sometime."

"I hope you will be very happy," she said earnestly; "you deserve to be." Her eyes were very soft.

"No, I do not," said Keith, almost angrily. "I am not at all what you suppose me to be."

"I will not allow you to say such things of yourself," she said, smiling. "I will not stand my friends being abused even by themselves."

Keith felt his courage waning. Her beauty, her sincerity, her tenderness, her innocence, her sweetness thrilled him. He turned back to her abruptly.

"I hope you will always think that of me," he said earnestly. "I promise to try to deserve it. Good-by."

"Good-by. Don't forget me." She held out her hand.

Keith took it and held it for a second.

"Never," he said, looking her straight in the eyes. "Good-by"; and with a muttered good-by to Dr. Locaman, who stood with wide-open eyes gazing at him, he turned and went down the steps.

"I don't like that man," said the young Doctor. This speech sealed his fate.

"Don't you? I do," said Lois, half dreamily. Her thoughts were far from the young physician at that moment; and when they returned to him, she knew that she would never marry him. A half-hour later, he knew it.

The next morning Lois received a note from Keith, saying he had left for his home.

When he bade Mrs. Lancaster good-by that evening, she looked as if she were really sorry that he was going. She walked with him down the verandah toward where his carriage awaited him, and Keith thought she had never looked sweeter.

He had never had a confidante,—at least, since he was a college boy,—and a little of the old feeling came to him. He lingered a little; but just then Mrs. Nailor came out of the door near him. For a moment Keith could almost have fancied he was back on the verandah at Gates's. Her mousing around had turned back the dial a dozen years.

Just what brought it about, perhaps, no one of the participants in the little drama could have told; but from this time the relations between the two ladies whom Keith left at the hotel that Summer night somehow changed. Not outwardly, for they still sat and talked together; but they were both conscious of a difference. They rather fenced with each other after that. Mrs. Nailor set it down to a simple cause. Mrs. Lancaster was in love with Gordon Keith, and he had not addressed her. Of this she was satisfied. Yet she was a little mystified. Mrs. Lancaster hardly defined the reason to herself.

She simply shut up on the side toward Mrs. Nailor, and barred her out. A strange thing was that she and Miss Huntington became great friends. They took to riding together, walking together, and seeing a great deal of each other, the elder lady spending much of her time up at Miss Huntington's home, among the shrubbery and flowers of the old place. It was a mystification to Mrs. Nailor, who frankly confessed that she could not account for it on the ground that Mrs. Lancaster wanted to find out how far matters had gone between Keith and Miss Huntington. "That girl is a sly minx," she said. "These governesses learn to be deceptive. I would not have her in my house."

If there was a more dissatisfied mortal in the world than Gordon Keith that Autumn, Keith did not know him. He worked hard, but it did not ease his mind. He tried retiring to his old home, as he had done in the Summer; but it was even worse than it had been then. Rumor came to him that Lois Huntington was engaged. It came through Mrs. Nailor, and he could not verify it; but, at least, she was lost to him. He cursed himself for a fool.

The picture of Mrs. Lancaster began to come to him oftener and oftener as she had appeared

to him that night on the verandah—handsome, dignified, serene, sympathetic. Why should he not seek release by this way? He had always admired her. He felt her sympathy; he recognized her charm; he appreciated her—yes, her advantage. Curse it! that was the trouble. If he were only in love with her! If she were not so manifestly advantageous, then he might think his feeling was more than friendship; for she was everything that he admired.

He was just in this frame of mind when a letter came from Rhodes, who had come home soon after Keith's visit to him. He had not been very well, and they had decided to take a yacht-cruise in Southern waters, and would he not come along? He could join them at either Hampton Roads or Savannah, and they were going to run over to the Bermudas.

Keith telegraphed that he would join them, and two days later turned his face to the South. Twenty-four hours afterward he was stepping up the gangway and being welcome by as gay a group as ever fluttered handkerchiefs to cheer a friend. Among them the first object that had caught his eye as he rowed out was the straight, lithe figure of Mrs. Lancaster. A man is always ready to think Providence interferes spec-

ially in his case, provided the interruption accords with his own views, and this looked to Keith very much as if it were Providence. For one thing, it saved him the trouble of thinking further of a matter which, the more he thought of it, the more he was perplexed. She came forward with the others, and welcomed him with her old frank, cordial grasp of the hand and gracious air. When he was comfortably settled, he felt a distinct self-content that he had decided to come.

A yacht-cruise is dependent on three things: the yacht itself, the company on board, and the weather. Keith had no cause to complain of any of these.

The "Virginia Dare" was a beautiful boat, and the weather was perfect—just the weather for a cruise in Southern waters. The company were all friends of Keith; and Keith found himself sailing in Summer seas, with Summer airs breathing about him. Keith was at his best. He was richly tanned by exposure, and as hard as a nail from work in the open air. Command of men had given him that calm assurance which is the mark of the captain. Ambition—ambition to be, not merely to possess—was once more calling to him with her inspiring

voice, and as he hearkened his face grew more and more distinguished. Providence, indeed, or Grinnell Rhodes was working his way, and it seemed to him—he admitted it with a pang of contempt for himself at the admission—that Mrs. Lancaster was at least acquiescent in their hands. Morning after morning they sat together in the shadow of the sail, and evening after evening together watched the moon with an ever-rounded golden circle steal up the cloudless sky. Keith was pleased to find how much interested he was becoming. Each day he admired her more and more; and each day he found her sweeter than she had been before. Once or twice she spoke to him of Lois Huntington, but each time she mentioned her, Keith turned the subject. She said that they had expected to have her join them; but she could not leave her aunt.

"I hear she is engaged," said Keith.

"Yes, I heard that. I do not believe it. Whom did you hear it from?"

"Mrs. Nailor."

"So did I."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE OLD IDEAL

ONE evening they sat on deck. Alice Lancaster had never appeared so sweet. It happened that Mrs. Rhodes had a headache and was down below, and Rhodes declared that he had some writing to do. So Mrs. Lancaster and Keith had the deck to themselves.

They had been sailing for weeks among emerald isles and through waters as blue as heaven. Even the "still-vex'd Bermoothes" had lent them their gentlest airs.

They had left the Indies and were now approaching the American shore. Their cruise was almost at an end, and possibly a little sadness had crept over them both. As she had learned more and more of his life and more and more of his character, she had found herself ready to give up everything for him if he only gave her what she craved. But one thing had made itself plain to Alice: Keith was not in

love with her as she knew he could be in love. If he were in love, it was with an ideal. And her woman's intuition told her that she was not that ideal.

This evening she was unusually pensive. She had never looked lovelier or been more gracious and charming, and as Keith thought of the past and of the future,—the long past in which they had been friends, the long future in which he would live alone,—his thought took the form of resolve. Why should they not always be together? She knew that he liked her, so he had not much to do to go further. The moon was just above the horizon, making a broad golden pathway to them. The soft lapping of the waves against the boat seemed to be a lullaby suited to the peacefulness of the scene; and the lovely form before him, clad in soft raiment that set it off, the fair face and gentle voice, appeared to fill everything with graciousness. Keith had more than once, in the past few weeks, considered how he would bring the subject up, and what he would say if he ever addressed her. He did not, however, go about it in the way he had planned. It seemed to him to come up spontaneously. Under the spell of the Summer night they had

drifted into talking of old times, and they both softened as their memory went back to their youth and their friendship that had begun among the Southern woods and had lasted so many years.

She had spoken of the influence his opinions had had with her.

"Do you know," he said presently, "I think you have exerted more influence on my life than any one else I ever knew after I grew up?"

She smiled, and her face was softer than usual.

"I should be very glad to think that, for I think there are few men who set out in life with such ideals as you had and afterwards realize them."

Keith thought of his father and of how steadily that old man had held to his ideals through everything. "I have not realized them," he said firmly. "I fear I have lost most of them. I set out in life with high ideals, which I got from my father; but, somehow, I seem to have changed them."

She shook her head with a pleasant light in her eyes.

"I do not think you have. Do you remember what you said to me once about your ideal?"

He turned and faced her. There was an expression of such softness and such sweetness in her face that a kind of anticipatory happiness fell on him.

"Yes; and I have always been in love with that ideal," he said gravely.

She said gently: "Yes, I knew it."

"Did you?" asked Keith, in some surprise. "I scarcely knew it myself, though I believe I have been for some time."

"Yes?" she said. "I knew that too."

Keith bent over her and took both her hands in his. "I love and want love in return—more than I can ever tell you."

A change came over her face, and she drew in her breath suddenly, glanced at him for a second, and then looked away, her eyes resting at last on the distance where a ship lay, her sails hanging idly in the dim haze. It might have been a dream-ship. At Keith's words a picture came to her out of the past. A young man was seated on the ground, with a fresh-budding bush behind him. Spring was all about then. He was young and slender and sun-browned, with deep-burning eyes and close-drawn mouth, with the future before him; whatever befell, with the hope and the courage to

conquer. He had conquered, as he then said he would to the young girl seated beside him.

"When I love," he was saying, "she must fill full the measure of my dreams. She must uplift me. She must have beauty and sweetness; she must choose the truth as that bird chooses the flowers. And to such an one I will give worship without end."

Years after, she had come across the phrase again in a poem. And at the words the same picture had come to her, and a sudden hunger for love, for such love,—the love she had missed in life,—had seized her. But it was then too late. She had taken in its place respect and companionship, a great establishment and social prominence.

For a moment her mother, sitting calm and calculating in the little room at Ridgely, foretelling her future and teaching, with commercial exactness, the advantages of such a union, flashed before her; and then once more for a moment came the heart-hunger for what she had missed.

Why should she not take the gift thus held out to her? She liked him and he liked her. She trusted him. It was the best chance of happiness she would ever have. Besides, she

could help him. He had powers, and she could give him the opportunity to develop them. Love would come. Who could tell? Perhaps, the other happiness might yet be hers. Why should she throw it away?

Would not life bring the old dream yet? Could it bring it? Here was the man whom she had known all her life, who filled almost the measure of her old dream, at her feet again. But was this love? Was this the "worship without end"? As her heart asked the question, and she lifted her eyes to his face, the answer came with it: No. He was too cool, too calm. This was but friendship and respect, that same "safe foundation" she had tried. This might do for some, but not for him. She had seen him, and she knew what he could feel. She had caught a glimpse of him that evening when Ferdy Wickersham was so attentive to the little Huntington girl. She had seen him that night in the theatre when the fire occurred. He was in love; but it was with Lois Huntington, and happiness might yet be his.

The next moment Alice's better nature reasserted itself. The picture of the young girl sitting with her serious face and her trustful eyes came back to her. Lois, moved by her

sympathy and friendship, had given her a glimpse of her true heart, which she knew she would have died before she would have shown another. She had confided in her absolutely. She heard the tones of her voice:

"Why, Mrs. Lancaster, I dream of him. He seems to me so real, so true. For such a man I could—I could worship him!" Then came the sudden lifting of the veil; the straight, confiding appealing glance, the opening of the soul, and the rush to her knees as she appealed for him.

It all passed through Mrs. Lancaster's mind as she looked far away over the slumbering sea, while Keith waited for her answer.

When she glanced up at Keith he was leaning over the rail, looking far away, his face calm and serious. What was he thinking of? Certainly not of her.

"No, you are not—not in love with me," she said firmly.

Keith started, and looked down on her with a changed expression.

She raised her hand with a gesture of protest, rose and stood beside him, facing him frankly.

"You are in love, but not with me."

Keith took her hand. She did not take it from him; indeed, she caught his hand with a firm clasp.

"Oh, no; you are not," she smiled. "I have had men in love with me—"

"You have had one, I know—" he began.

"Yes, once, a long time ago—and I know the difference. I told you once that I was not what you thought me."

"And I told you—" began Keith; but she did not pause.

"I am still less so now. I am not in the least what you think me—or you are not what I think you."

"You are just what I think you," began Keith. "You are the most charming woman in the world—you are my—" He hesitated as she looked straight into his eyes and shook her head.

"What? No, I am not. I am a worldly, world-worn woman. Oh, yes, I am," as dissent spoke in his face. "I know the world and am a part of it and depend upon it. Yes, I am. I am so far gone that I cannot recognize and admire what is better, higher, and nobler than the world of which I speak; but I am bound to the wheel— Is not that the illustration you

wrote me once? I thought then it was absurd. I know now how true it is."

"I do not think you are," declared Keith. "If you were, I would claim the right to release you—to save you for—yourself and—"

She shook her head.

"No, no. I have become accustomed to my Sybarite's couch of which you used to tell me. Would you be willing to give up all you have striven for and won—your life—the honors you have won and hope to win?"

"They are nothing—those I have won! Those I hope to win, I would win for us both. You should help me. They would be for you, Alice." His eyes were deep in hers.

She fetched a long sigh.

"No, no; once, perhaps, I might have—but now it is too late. I chose my path and must follow it. You would not like to give up all you—hope for—and become like—some we know?"

"God forbid!"

"And I say, 'Amen.' And if you would, I would not be willing to have you do it. You are too much to me—I honor you too much," she corrected quickly, as she caught the expression in his face. "I could not let you sink into

a—society man—like—some of those I sit next to and dance with and drive with and—enjoy and despise. Do I not know that if you loved me you would have convinced me of it in a moment? You have not convinced me. You are in love,—as you said just now,—but not with me. You are in love with Lois Huntington."

Keith almost staggered. It was so direct and so exactly what his thought had been just now. But he said:

"Oh, nonsense! Lois Huntington considers me old enough to be her grandfather. Why, she—she is engaged to or in love with Dr. Locaman."

"She is not," said Mrs. Lancaster, firmly, "and she never will be. If you go about it right she will marry you." She added calmly: "I hope she will, with all my heart."

"Marry me! Lois Huntington! Why—"

"She considers me her grandmother, perhaps; but not you her grandfather. She thinks you are much too young for me. She thinks you are the most wonderful and the best and most charming man in the world."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I do not know where she got such an idea —unless you told her so yourself," she said, with a smile.

"I would like her to think it," said Keith, smiling; "but I have studiously avoided divulging myself in my real and fatal character."

"Then she must have got it from the only other person who knows you in your true character."

"And that is—?"

She looked into his eyes with so amused and so friendly a light in her own that Keith lifted her hand to his lips.

" I do not deserve such friendship. "

"Yes, you do; you taught it to me."

He sat back in his chair, trying to think. But all he could think of was how immeasurably he was below both these women.

"Will you forgive me?" he said suddenly, almost miserably. He meant to say more, but she rose, and at the moment he heard a step behind him. He thought her hand touched his head for a second, and that he heard her answer, "Yes"; but he was not sure, for just then Mrs. Rhodes spoke to them, and they all three had to pretend that they thought nothing unusual had been going on.

They received their mail next day, and were all busy reading letters, when Mrs. Rhodes gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh, just hear this! Little Miss Huntington's old aunt is dead."

There was an exclamation from every one.

"Yes," she went on reading, with a faint little conventional tone of sympathy in her voice; "she died ten days ago—very suddenly, of heart-disease."

"Oh, poor little Lois! I am so sorry for her!" It was Alice Lancaster's voice.

But Keith did not hear any more. His heart was aching, and he was back among the shrubbery of The Lawns. All that he knew was that Rhodes and Mrs. Rhodes were expressing sympathy, and that Mrs. Lancaster, who had not said a word after the first exclamation, excused herself and left the saloon. Keith made up his mind promptly. He went up on deck. Mrs. Lancaster was sitting alone far aft in the shadow. Her back was toward him, and her hand was to her eyes. He went up to her. She did not look up; but Keith felt that she knew it was he.

"You must go to her," she said.

"Yes," said Keith. "I shall. I wish you would come."

"Oh, I wish I could! Poor little thing!" she sighed.

Two days after that Keith walked into the hotel at Brookford. The clerk recognized him as he appeared, and greeted him cordially. Something in Keith's look or manner, perhaps, recalled his former association with the family at The Lawns, for, as Keith signed his name, he said:

"Sad thing, that, up on the hill."

"What?" said Keith, absently.

"The old lady's death and the breaking up of the old place," he said.

"Oh!—yes, it is," said Keith; and then, thinking that he could learn if Miss Huntington were there without appearing to do so, except casually, he said:

"Who is there now?"

"There is not any one there at all, I believe."

Keith ordered a room, and a half-hour later went out.

Instead of taking a carriage, he walked. There had been a change in the weather. The snow covered everything, and the grounds looked wintry and deserted. The gate was unlocked, but had not been opened lately, and Keith had hard work to open it wide enough to let himself through. He tramped along through the snow, and turning the curve in

the road, was in front of the house. It was shut up. Every shutter was closed, as well as the door, and a sudden chill struck him. Still he went on; climbed the wide, unswept steps, crossed the portico, and rang the bell, and finally knocked. The sound made him start. How lonesome it seemed! He knocked again, but no one came. Only the snowbirds on the portico stopped and looked at him curiously. Finally, he thought he heard some one in the snow. He turned as a man came around the house. It was the old coachman and factotum. He seemed glad enough to see Keith, and Keith was, at least, glad to see him.

"It's a bad business, it is, Mr. Kathe," he said sadly.

"Yes, it is, John. Where is Miss Huntington?"

"Gone, sir," said John, with surprise in his voice that Keith should not know.

"Gone where?"

"An' that no one knows," said John.

"What! What do you mean?"

"Just that, sir," said the old fellow. "She went away two days after the funeral, an' not a worrd of her since."

"But she 's at some relative's?" said Keith, seeking information at the same time he gave it.

"No, sir; not a relative in the world she has, except Mr. Wentworth in New York, and she has not been there."

Keith learned, in the conversation which followed, that Miss Abigail had died very suddenly, and that two days after the funeral Miss Lois had had the house shut up, and taking only a small trunk, had left by train for New York. They had expected to hear from her, though she said they would not do so for some time; and when no letter had come they had sent to New York, but had failed to find her. This all seemed natural enough. Lois was abundantly able to take care of herself, and, no doubt, desired for the present to be in some place of retirement. Keith decided, therefore, that he would simply go to the city and ascertain where she was. He thought of going to see Dr. Locaman, but something restrained him. The snow was deep, and he was anxious to find Lois; so he went straight down to the city that evening. The next day he discovered that it was not quite so easy to find one who wished to be lost. Norman knew nothing of her.

Norman and his wife were now living with old Mrs. Wentworth, and they had all invited her to come to them; but she had declined. Keith was much disturbed.

Lois, however, was nearer than Keith dreamed.

Her aunt's death had stricken Lois deeply. She could not bear to go to New York. It stood to her only for hardness and isolation.

Just then a letter came from Dr. Balsam. She must come to him, he said. He was sick, or he would come for her. An impulse seized her to go to him. She would go back to the scenes of her childhood: the memories of her father drew her; the memory also of her aunt in some way urged her. Dr. Balsam appeared just then nearer to her than any one else. She could help him. It seemed a haven of refuge to her.

Twenty-four hours later the old Doctor was sitting in his room. He looked worn and old and dispirited. The death of an old friend had left a void in his life.

There was a light step outside and a rap at the door.

"It's the servant," thought the Doctor, and called somewhat gruffly, "Come in."

When the door opened it was not the servant. For a moment the old man scarcely took in who it was. She seemed to be almost a vision. He had never thought of Lois in black. She was so like a girl he had known long, long ago.

Then she ran forward, and as the old man rose to his feet she threw her arms about his neck, and the world suddenly changed for him —changed as much as if it had been new-created.

From New York Keith went down to the old plantation to see his father. The old gentleman was renewing his youth among his books. He was much interested in Keith's account of his yachting-trip. While there Keith got word of important business which required his presence in New Leeds immediately. Ferdy Wickersham had returned, and had brought suit against his company, claiming title to all the lands they had bought from Adam Rawson.

On his arrival at New Leeds, Keith learned that Wickersham had been there just long enough to institute his suit, the papers in which had been already prepared before he came. There was much excitement in the place. Wickersham had boasted that he had made a great deal of money in South America.

"He claims now," said Keith's informant, Captain Turley, "that he owns all of Squire Rawson's lands. He says you knew it was all his when you sold it to them Englishmen, and that Mr. Rhodes, the president of the company, knew it was his, and he has been defrauded."

"Well, we will see about that," said Keith, grimly.

"That's what old Squire Rawson said. The old man came up as soon as he heard he was here; but Wickersham didn't stay but one night. He had lighted out."

"What did the squire come for?" inquired Keith, moved by his old friend's expression.

"He said he came to kill him. And he'd have done it. If Wickersham's got any friends they'd better keep him out of his way." His face testified his earnestness.

Keith had a curious feeling. Wickersham's return meant that he was desperate. In some way, too, Keith felt that Lois Huntington was concerned in his movements. He was glad to think that she was abroad.

But Lois was being drawn again into his life in a way that he little knew.

In the seclusion and quietude of Ridgely at that season, Lois soon felt as if she had reached, at last, a safe harbor. The care of the old Doctor gave her employment, and her mind, after a while, began to recover its healthy tone. She knew that the happiness of which she had once dreamed would never be hers; but she was sustained by the reflection that she had tried to do

her duty: she had sacrificed herself for others. She spent her time trying to help those about her. She had made friends with Squire Rawson, and the old man found much comfort in talking to her of Phrony.

Sometimes, in the afternoon, when she was lonely, she climbed the hill and looked after the little plot in which lay the grave of her father. She remembered her mother but vaguely: as a beautiful vision, blurred by the years; but her father was clear in her memory. His smile, his cheeriness, his devotion to her remained with her. And the memory of him who had been her friend in her childhood came to her sometimes, saddening her, till she would arouse herself and by an effort banish him from her thoughts.

Often when she went up to the cemetery she would see others there: women in black, with a fresher sorrow than hers; and sometimes the squire, who was beginning now to grow feeble and shaky with age, would be sitting on a bench among the shrubbery beside a grave on which he had placed flowers. The grave was Phrony's. Once he spoke to her of Wickersham. He had brought a suit against the old man, claiming that he had a title to all of the latter's property. The old fellow was greatly stirred up by it. He denounced him furiously.

"He has robbed me of her," he said. "Let him beware. If he ever comes across my path I shall kill him."

So the Winter passed, and Spring was beginning to come. Its harbingers, in their livery of red and green, were already showing on the hillsides. The redbud was burning on the Southern slopes; the turf was springing, fresh and green; dandelions were dappling the grass like golden coins sown by a prodigal; violets were beginning to peep from the shelter of leaves caught along the fence-rows; and some favored peach-trees were blushing into pink.

For some reason the season made Lois sad. Was it that it was Nature's season for mating; the season for Youth to burst its restraining bonds and blossom into love? She tried to fight the feeling; but it clung to her. Dr. Balsam, watching her with quickened eyes, grew graver, and prescribed a tonic. Once he had spoken to her of Keith, and she had told him that he was to marry Mrs. Lancaster. But the old man had made a discovery. And he never spoke to her of him again.

Lois, to her surprise and indignation, received one morning a letter from Wickersham asking her to make an appointment with him on a matter of mutual interest. He wished, he said, to

make friends with old Mr. Rawson and she could help him. He mentioned Keith and casually spoke of his engagement. She took no notice of this letter; but one afternoon she was lonelier than usual, and she went up the hill to her father's grave. Adam Rawson's horse was tied to the fence, and across the lots she saw him among the rose-bushes at Phrony's grave. She sat down and gave herself up to reflection. Gradually the whole of her life in New York passed before her: its unhappiness; its promise of joy for a moment; and then the shutting of it out, as if the windows of her soul had been closed.

She heard the gate click, and presently heard a step behind her. As it approached she turned and faced Ferdy Wickersham. She seemed to be almost in a dream. He had aged somewhat, and his dark face had hardened. Otherwise he had not changed. He was still very handsome. She felt as if a chill blast had struck her. She caught his eye on her, and knew that he had recognized her. As he came up the path toward her, she rose and moved away; but he cut across to intercept her, and she heard him speak her name.

She took no notice, but walked on.

"Miss Huntington." He stepped in front of her.

Her head went up, and she looked him in the eyes with a scorn in hers that stung him. "Move, if you please."

His face flushed, then paled again.

"I heard you were here, and I have come to see you, to talk with you," he began. "I wish to be friends with you."

She waved him aside.

"Let me pass, if you please."

"Not until you have heard what I have to say. You have done me a great injustice; but I put that by. I have been robbed by persons you know, persons who are no friends of yours, whom I understand you have influence with, and you can help to right matters. It will be worth your while to do it."

She attempted to pass around him; but he stepped before her.

"You might as well listen; for I have come here to talk to you, and I mean to do it. I can show you how important it is for you to aid me —to advise your friends to settle. Now, will you listen?"

" No. " She looked him straight in the eyes.

"Oh, I guess you will," he sneered. "It con-

cerns your friend, Mr. Keith, whom you thought so much of. Your friend Keith has placed himself in a very equivocal position. I will have him behind bars before I am done. Wait until I have shown that when he got all that money from the English people he knew that that land was mine, and that he had run the lines falsely on which he got the money."

"Let me pass," said Lois. With her head held high she started again to walk by him; but he seized her by the wrist.

"This is not Central Park. You shall hear me."

"Let me go, Mr. Wickersham," she said imperiously. But he held her firmly.

At that moment she heard an oath behind her, and a voice exclaimed:

"It is you, at last! And still troubling women!"

Wickersham's countenance suddenly changed. He released her wrist and fell back a step, his face blanching. The next second, as she turned quickly, old Adam Rawson's bulky figure was before her. He was hurrying toward her: the very apothesis of wrath. His face was purple; his eyes blazed; his massive form was erect, and quivering with fury. His heavy stick was

gripped in his left hand, and with the other he was drawing a pistol from his pocket.

"I have waited for you, you dog, and you have come at last!" he cried.

Wickersham, falling back before his advance, was trying, as Lois looked, to get out a pistol. His face was as white as death. Lois had no time for thought. It was simply instinct. Old Rawson's pistol was already levelled. With a cry she threw herself between them; but it was too late.

She was only conscious of a roar and blinding smoke in her eyes and of something like a hot iron at her side; then, as she sank down, of Squire Rawson's stepping over her. Her sacrifice was in vain, for the old man was not to be turned from his revenge. As he had sworn, so he performed. And the next moment Wickersham, with two bullets in his body, had paid to him his long-piled-up debt.

When Lois came to, she was in bed, and Dr. Balsam was leaning over her with a white, set face.

"I am all right," she said, with a faint smile. "Was he hurt?"

"Don't talk now," said the Doctor, quietly. "Thank God, you are not hurt much."

Keith was sitting in his office in New Leeds alone that afternoon. He had just received a telegram from Dave Dennison that Wickersham had left New York. Dennison had learned that he was going to Ridgely to try to make up with old Rawson. Just then the paper from Ridgely was brought in. Keith's eye fell on the headlines of the first column, and he almost fell from his chair as he read the words:

DOUBLE TRAGEDY—FATAL SHOOTING

F. C. WICKERSHAM SHOOTS MISS LOIS HUNTINGTON AND IS KILLED BY SQUIRE RAWSON

The account of the shooting was in accordance with the heading, and was followed by the story of the Wickersham-Rawson trouble.

Keith snatched out his watch, and the next second was dashing down the street on his way to the station. A train was to start for the east in five minutes. He caught it as it ran out of the station, and swung himself up to the rear platform.

Curiously enough, in his confused thoughts of Lois Huntington and what she had meant to him was mingled the constant recollection of old Tim Gilsey and his lumbering stage running through the pass.

It was late in the evening when he reached Ridgely; but he hastened at once to Dr. Balsam's office. The moon was shining, and it brought back to him the evenings on the verandah at Gates's so long ago. But it seemed to him that it was Lois Huntington who had been there among the pillows; that it was Lois Huntington who had always been there in his memory. He wondered if she would be as she was then, as she lay dead. And once or twice he wondered if he could be losing his wits; then he gripped himself and cleared his mind.

In ten minutes he was in Dr. Balsam's office. The Doctor greeted him with more coldness than he had ever shown him. Keith felt his suspicion.

"Where is Lois—Miss Lois Huntington? Is she—?" He could not frame the question.

"She is doing very well."

Keith's heart gave a bound of hope. The blood surged back and forth in his veins. Life seemed to revive for him.

"Is she alive? Will she live?" he faltered.

"Yes. Who says she will not?" demanded the Doctor, testily.

"The paper—the despatch."

"No thanks to you that she does!" He faced

Keith, and suddenly flamed out: "I want to tell you that I think you have acted like a damned rascal!"

Keith's jaw dropped, and he actually staggered with amazement. "What! What do you mean? I do not understand!"

"You are not a bit better than that dog that you turned her over to, who got his deserts yesterday."

"But I do not understand!" gasped Keith, white and hot.

"Then I will tell you. You led that innocent girl to believe that you were in love with her, and then when she was fool enough to believe you and let herself become—interested, you left her to run, like a little puppy, after a rich woman."

"Where did you hear this?" asked Keith, still amazed, but recovering himself. "What have you heard? Who told you?"

"Not from her." He was blazing with wrath.

"No; but from whom?"

"Never mind. From some one who knew the facts. It is the truth."

"But it is not the truth. I have been in love with Lois Huntington since I first met her."

"Then why in the name of heaven did you treat her so?"

"How? I did not tell her so because I heard she was in love with some one else—and engaged to him. God knows I have suffered enough over it. I would die for her." His expression left no room for doubt as to his sincerity.

The old man's face gradually relaxed, and presently something that was almost a smile came into his eyes. He held out his hand.

"I owe you an apology. You are a d—d fool!"

"Can I see her?" asked Keith.

"I don't know that you can see anything. But I could, if I were in your place. She is on the side verandah at my hospital—where Gates's tavern stood. She is not much hurt, though it was a close thing. The ball struck a button and glanced around. She is sitting up. I shall bring her home as soon as she can be moved."

Keith paused and reflected a moment, then held out his hand.

"Doctor, if I win her will you make our house your home?"

The old man's face softened, and he held out his hand again.

"You will have to come and see me sometimes."

Five minutes later Keith turned up the walk that led to the side verandah of the building that Dr. Balsam had put up for his sanatorium on the site of Gates's hotel. The moon was slowly sinking toward the western mountain-tops, flooding with soft light the valley below, and touching to silver the fleecy clouds that, shepherded by the gentle wind, wreathed the highest peaks beyond. How well Keith remembered it all: the old house with its long verandah; the moonlight flooding it; the white figure reclining there; and the boy that talked of his ideal of loveliness and love. She was there now; it seemed to him that she had been there always, and the rest was merely a dream. He walked up on the turf, but strode rapidly. He could not wait. As he mounted the steps, he took off his hat.

"Good evening." He spoke as if she must expect him.

She had not heard him before. She was reclining among pillows, and her face was turned toward the western sky. Her black dress gave him a pang. He had never thought of her in black, except as a little girl. And such she almost seemed to him now.

She turned toward him and gave a gasp.

"Mr. Keith!"

"Lois—I have come—" he began.

"Lois—I have come—" he began, and stopped.

She held out her hand and tried to sit up. Keith took her hand softly, as if it were a rose, and closing his firmly over it, fell on one knee beside her chair.

"Don't try to sit up," he said gently. "I went to Brookford as soon as I heard of it—" he began, and then placed his other hand on hers, covering it with his firm grasp.

"I thought you would," she said simply.

Keith lifted her hand and held it against his cheek. He was silent a moment. What should he say to her? Not only all other women, but all the rest of the world, had disappeared.

"I have come, and I shall not go away again until you go with me."

For answer she hid her face and began to cry softly. Keith knelt with her hand to his lips, murmuring his love.

"I am so glad you have come. I don't know what to do," she said presently.

"You do not have to know. I know. It is decided. I love you—I have always loved you. And no one shall ever come between us. You are mine—mine only." He went on pouring out his soul to her.

"My old Doctor—?" she began presently, and looked up at him with eyes "like stars half-quenched in mists of silver dew."

"He agrees. We make him live with us."

"Your father—?"

"Him, too. You shall be their daughter."

She gave him her hands.

"Well, on that condition."

The first person Keith sought to tell of his new happiness was his father. The old gentleman was sitting on the porch at Elphinstone in the sun, enjoying the physical sensation of warmth that means so much to extreme youth and extreme age. He held a copy of Virgil in his hand, but he was not reading; he was repeating passages of it by heart. They related to the quiet life. His son heard him saying softly:

> "'O Fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint,
> Agricolas!'"

His mind was possibly far back in the past.

His placid face lit up with the smile that always shone there when his son appeared.

"Well, what's the news?" he asked. "I know it must be good."

"It is," smiled Keith. "I am engaged to be married."

The old gentleman's book fell to the floor.

"You don't say so! Ah, that's very good! Very good! I am glad of that; every young man ought to marry. There is no happiness like it in this world, whatever there may be in the next.

'Interea dulces pendent circum oscula nati.'

I will come to see you," he smiled.

"Come and see me!"

"But I am not very much at home in New York," he pursued rather wistfully; "it is too noisy for me. I am too old-fashioned for it."

"New York? But I'm not going to live in New York!"

A slight shadow swept over the General's face.

"Well, you must live where she will be happiest," he said thoughtfully. "A gentleman owes that to his wife.—Do you think she will be willing to live elsewhere?"

"Who do you think it is, sir?"

"Mrs. Lancaster, isn't it?"

"Why, no; it is Lois Huntington. I am engaged to her. She has promised to marry me."

"To her!—to Lois Huntington?—my little girl!" The old gentleman rose to his feet, his face alight with absolute joy. "That is something like it! Where is she? When is it to be? I will come and live with you."

"Of course, you must. It is on that condition that she agrees to marry me," said Keith, smiling with new happiness at his pleasure.

"'In her tongue is the law of kindness,'" quoted the old gentleman. "God bless you both. 'Her price is far above rubies.'" And after a pause he added gently: "I hope your mother knows of this. I think she must: she seems so close to me to-day."

THE END

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